WHALE, BEAR, AND MAN: THE DEMYTHOLOGIZATION OF THE HUNTER-HERO IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

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Title: Whale, Bear, and Man: The Demythologization of the Hunter-Hero in American Literature

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This thesis aims to recognize *Blood Meridian*, *"The Bear*," and Moby Dick as narratives that subvert and interrogate the myth of the American frontier. Originating in the hunter-hero quest, these narratives challenge the convention of "regeneration through violence" and deny their heroes creative powers over the wilderness. Instead these three works illuminate the violence and troubling aspect that underlie the myth and which the archetype sought to cover up. In the conventional structure of the myth, the hunter-hero creates a new world as he himself evolves into a higher state of being, articulating an engagement with the frontier as a productive and constructive enterprise. However, *Blood Meridian* and "The Bear," and *Moby-Dick* present a pervasive doom, a doom distinctive in their aesthetic and thematic preoccupations with self-defeating heroism, horrific transgression, and ubiquitous destruction. "Doom! Doom! Doom!" D.H. Lawrence recognizes the terrible fatalism at the heart of *Moby-Dick*: "Something seems to whisper it in the very dark tress of America. Doom!"[1] Faulkner and McCarthy also recognize a similar, distinctly American doom in their own hunting narratives. For these three works probe and undermine the hunter-hero tradition in creating narratives that revise and rewrite the popular

[1] D.H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977): 168.

mythology of the hunter-hero, culminating in depictions that unsettle pervasive American ideals and overwhelm the national character with the slaughter of its history.

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Introduction

From Walden Pond, Henry David Thoreau set out into the unexplored backwoods of Maine and cataloged the wilderness—flora, fauna, animal life, and Indigenous culture. Three times, Thoreau made the excursion and his three experiences are recorded in the collection *The Maine Woods*. In his final essay, he speaks about no longer fearing the growl of the bear or scream of the panther, for he has learned humans often scare off such terrors, leaving only their tracks as evidence of their existence. "Generally speaking," Thoreau writes, "a howling wilderness does not howl: it is the imagination of the traveler that does the howling."[2]

Since the first British pilgrims beached on the New World, the cultural idea of a frontier, between settlement and a howling wilderness existed. Before the birth of America, the frontier held a great significance in society as space that offered opportunity, freedom, and moral renewal. Puritans and Mormons, slaveholders and abolitionists, politicians and entrepreneurs looked West with creative energies to remake and renew society. Beyond the frontier line, land waited that was by turns empty and people-less, replete with resources and easy wealth, ordinated by God for the Anglo-Saxon race, offered a New Eden, and provided

[2] Henry David Thoreau, *The Maine Woods* (Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1972): 242.

an escape from civilization for visionaries as well as degenerates. But often such narratives saw beyond the frontier, a wilderness that opposed them whether in the character of demon savages, legendary beasts, heretical governments, or in nature itself, imposing and sublime.

The narratives that emerge from the space and the idea of the frontier centers this thesis which investigates the hunter-hero archetype and the mythology of the hunt as represented in American Literature. As a towering cultural figure, the hunter-hero represented a definition of the American character, a distinct identity from English and Europe, and provided a popular character that was capable of overcoming the howling wilderness. As a mythic figure, the hunter-hero offered a narrative that eased prevailing fears and concerns in America about identity, about the relationship between society and nature, and about the violence that pervaded on the frontier. By the mid-19th century, the hunter-hero narrative loomed large in literature with particular tropes, themes, and structures when Herman Melville wrote his great whaling novel *Moby-Dick*. The hunting tradition possessed enough of a basis, this thesis argues, for it not only to be recognized in Melville's work, but also in shaping crucial aspects of its narrative. And this investment of the hunter-hero mythology in *Moby-Dick*, this thesis contends, connects the novel with two later American hunting narratives William Faulkner's "The Bear" and Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* whose authors share a similar stature with Melville in the American literary canon.

This thesis aims to recognize *Blood Meridian*, "The Bear," and Moby Dick as narratives that subvert and interrogate the myth of the American frontier. Originating in the hunter-hero quest, these narratives challenge the convention of "regeneration through violence" and deny their heroes creative powers over the wilderness. Instead these three works illuminate the violence and troubling aspect that underlie the myth and which the

archetype sought to cover up. In the conventional structure of the myth, the hunter-hero creates a new world as he himself evolves into a higher state of being, articulating an engagement with the frontier as a productive and constructive enterprise. However, *Blood Meridian* and "The Bear" and *Moby-Dick* present a pervasive doom, a doom distinctive in their aesthetic and thematic preoccupations with self-defeating heroism, horrific transgression, and ubiquitous destruction. "Doom! Doom! Doom!" D.H. Lawrence recognizes the terrible fatalism at the heart of *Moby-Dick*: "Something seems to whisper it in the very dark tress of America. Doom!"[3] Faulkner and McCarthy also recognize a similar, distinctly American doom in their own hunting narratives. For these three works probe and undermine the hunter-hero tradition in creating narratives that revise and rewrite the popular mythology of the hunter-hero, culminating in depictions that unsettle pervasive American ideals and overwhelm the national character with the slaughter of its history.

This thesis intends to establish that *Blood Meridian* engages with "The Bear" on an extensive and significant basis on the basis of the mythology of the hunter-hero and in particular upon Melville's interrogation of the myth in *Moby-Dick*. Scholarship on *Blood Meridian* has recognized points of connection between McCarthy's work and *Moby-Dick* and well as with "The Bear." This thesis brings the three great hunting narratives in American fiction together for the first time. Through biographical information, archival research, and textual analysis both technical and thematic, this thesis then proposes a literary lineage exists between *Moby-Dick*, "The Bear," and *Blood Meridian*. Richard Slotkin's landmark study of the hunter-hero in American literature *Regeneration through Violence* grounds my understanding the hunter-hero tradition and the tradition's investment upon *Moby-Dick*.

[3] D.H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977): 168.

Extending Slotkin's work as well as Rick Wallach's "MobyBear," which recognized the structural and thematic concordances between *Moby-Dick* and "The Bear," this thesis seeks to align *Blood Meridian* with "The Bear" and thereby propose a revisionist literary tradition that begins with Melville.

To do so, this thesis seeks to understand the hunter-hero tradition, its significance and its central features which provides a foundation for the following argument for the correspondence between *Moby-Dick* and the hunter-hero tradition. After recognizing such similarities, this thesis then identifies Melville's diversions from the tradition and contends that such derivations reveal important insights into the book. The following chapter on "The Bear" follows a similar approach with the additional intention of analyzing the relationship between the novella and *Moby-Dick*. Like "MobyBear," this thesis approaches examinations of literary influence not only by identifying technical and thematic connections but also in seeing a dynamic between the parent text and the latter author. A dynamic that sees Faulkner consciously assimilating aspects of *Moby-Dick* while also shifting his emphasis upon a different focus than that of Melville. Thereby, the thesis moves to an examination of *Blood Meridian* in context of *Moby-Dick*, "The Bear," and the hunter-hero tradition.

In establishing a sustained correspondence between the authors in regard to style, theme, and character through close readings and comparative analyses, this thesis offers an opportunity for new readings of all three works. Engaged with the hunter-hero as well as with the dynamic between *Moby-Dick* and "The Bear," this thesis attempts to de-emphasize readings of *Blood Meridian* that attribute significance to themes and ideas that McCarthy borrowed from the earlier works. Instead, this thesis sheds light on McCarthy's diversions,

where the novel breaks new ground not present in its influences, and sees such moments holding crucial importance for our understanding of the novel.

My foremost goal with this thesis is to motivate more attention and scholarship between the connections between *Blood Meridian*, "The Bear," and *Blood Meridian*. So much more remains to be recognized between these works that I did not have the time, space, or ability to recognize. Just as Rick Wallach's *Moby Bear* motivated me, I hope this thesis will likewise promote curiosity and subsequent research. The dynamics between these works' depictions of Indigenous populations, portrayal of frontier spaces, connectivity between hunting and writing, notions of death and disappearance, and more readings await articulation.

Critical Landscape

Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* provokes intense debate and a diversity of perspectives in its scholarship over classifying the novel's genre, influences, and focus upon violence. The novel supports a wealth of critical perspectives, and this fact increasingly dominates the critical community. Kurt Cavender points out that since the 1990s "accounting for this interpretive diversity has become practically its own sub-genre of McCarthy criticism."[4] Consequently, there is a frustrating lack of common ground on which to enter the debate and some obligation to address the interpretive diversity. The diversity

[4] Kurt Cavender, "Our Knowing Compelled to Go Back: Speculative Misreading and the Identity of Blood Meridian," *College Literature, Volume 43, Number 4*, (2016): 694.

and discord in the critical landscape extends partly from McCarthy's writing process and the unique character of the book.

The wildly disparate readings of *Blood Meridian*, documented by scholars such as John Sepich, Dianne C. Luce, and Michael Lynn Crews, attests to the richness of McCarthy as an author. Yet the diversity of the criticism provokes a notion of ultimate unknowability for McCarthy's novel. An example: when asked about reading *Blood Meridian* as a critique of American Imperialism, Harold Bloom said such theory is "too simplistic an understanding of McCarthy." To illustrate that such a reading does not do justice to the novel's artistry, Bloom refers to the doomed Apaches advancing upon Glanton's Gang, the latter freshly equipped with black powder. Bloom continues: "I don't think that the aesthetically minded reader is trying to think of that as a sociological commentary on the degradation of the Apache Nation. It's a grand picaresque in its own right."[5] Bloom captures here the continuous debate around Blood Meridian and its enigmatic character that's stems from how the novel provokes diverse readings while resisting overarching theories that attempt to account for it. Bloom explains this novel's quality as 'an evasion of themes' which forms an essential part of McCarthy's artistry and generates the diversity of critical opinions on it.

McCarthy's writing process helps to explain the evasion of themes and diversity of ideas that *Blood Meridian* contains. Michael Lynn Crews asserts in *Books Made out of Books* that "what we discover in the archives, in instance after instance, is that ideas are, for McCarthy, material, just as images, metaphors, and striking turns of phrase are….look more

[5] Harold Bloom, "Harold Bloom on Blood Meridian," Interview by Leonard Pierce, Avclub.com, June 15, 2009. https://www.avclub.com/harold-bloom-on-blood-meridian-1798216782.

like colors on a painter's palette than ideas indexed for later development."[6] Crews understands McCarthy assembling various artifacts not in building an ideological structure but in forming a work of art wholly different, to quote the Judge, "not the history of each nor indeed the sum of those histories."[7] Like one of Picasso's synthetic collages in which he realizes the form of a guitar in a composition of unassociated materials— scraps of sheet music, drawings, wallpaper, etc.— *Blood Meridian* as a conceptual whole resists explanation from its components. Crews contends: "even when we find McCarthy appropriating the works of other thinkers, it is difficult to draw a line between intellectual and aesthetic appropriation, so suffused with the latter is the former."[8] McCarthy appears to consciously trying to write himself into a literary tradition in invoking the themes and aesthetics of great writers. Such facts motivate this thesis to understand McCarthy through the context of literary and cultural history, one he himself seems aware of writing within.

Over the course of the novel, this process of assemblage bears out. Dana Phillips recognizes the significance of McCarthy's writing style which demonstrates a preference for the technical and literary over ideological consistency:

> The speech of McCarthy's protagonists (perhaps his own as well) is no longer, then, an index of characterological or personal traits, the instrument with which to divine some hidden and occult order in the world, but simply a historical and literary artifact. For that reason, it is available to the writer without regard for psychological or moral or political propriety… Once psychology, morality, and politics come to be

[6] Michael Lynn Crews, *Books Are Made Out of Books* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2017): 12.
[7] Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* (New York: Vintage International, 1985), pg. 342.
[8] Michael Lynn Crews, *Books Are Made Out of Books* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2017): 12.

> seen as mere languages, propriety becomes a highly relative question, even an uninteresting one.[9]

McCarthy appears to willingly resist political narratives and embrace mysteries that such ideologies seek to explain. The language of politics McCarthy employs is disengaged from political systems and structures that act as tangible forces of coercion and oppression upon human and particularly minority populations. For example, McCarthy recognizes a racist basis for Manifest Destiny in Captain White but characterizes such filibuster army as partisans acting independently from the state. Yet the American government embarked on wars like the Mexican War which demonstrated racism in systemized policy of American politics and Manifest Destiny. McCarthy shows a tendency to present characters that act outside of and unofficially from society or government in order to resist aligning his work with specific political ideologies. The literary, philosophical, and historical shards McCarthy uses to create *Blood Meridian* fail to create definite narratives that develop and resolve in the course of the novel. The state of ideas as "languages" in the novel tempt the reader to understand them as perspectives capable of ordering and stabilizing the text, although McCarthy ultimately tries to undermine such overarching theories in explaining *Blood Meridian*. Tracing recurring sources in *Blood Meridian* to order meaning runs the risk of mistaking thematic understanding in largely aesthetic elements. But in reading the novel alongside its principal influence and thematic predecessors— the hunting narratives of *Moby-Dick* and "The Bear"—offers readers a perspective that is strongly rooted in what little information stands as common ground in the scholarship on McCarthy.

[9] Dana Phillips, "History and the Ugly Facts," *Cormac McCarthy: New Directions*, ed. James Lilley (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002), 449.

My approach attempts to recognize the larger narrative structures and conventions that McCarthy engages with and rewrites in *Blood Meridian*. A tradition uniquely American, I see McCarthy engaging with a national literary canon more so than the wider Western tradition. Rather than Melville and Faulkner who show through engagements with Plato and the Bible, respectively, their interest in the more ancient influences on Western literature, McCarthy demonstrates an emphasis on the national symbolical and the American canon which stood less established in Faulkner's and especially so in Melville's time. Since emphasizing surface rather than close readings runs the risk conflating aesthetics and philosophy, I will look at *Blood Meridian's* larger formal elements and engage only McCarthy's most prominent and established influences. In doing so, my thesis aims to aggregate some prominent grounds of agreement in the critical landscape. Faulkner, Melville, *Regeneration through Violence*, and the myth and ritual of the hunt in American literature all figure throughout scholarship on the novel, yet the existing criticism has yet to consider them altogether.

Chapter 1: The Mythic American Hunter-Hero

The hunter-hero pervades the imagination of American society throughout the nation's history and appears in both fictional and historical forms, often a mixture of both. At the intersection of reality and myth towered the most recognizable hunter-heroes like Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett, who stand among the defining figures of American identity (at least for white American men.) The hunter-hero continued to persist even after Frederick Jackson Turner declared the frontier dead in America, thereafter occupying the country's highest office in the figure of Theodore Roosevelt and treated with old world royalty when

Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show crossed the Atlantic. Explaining its mythic appeal and popularity, the American hunter captures the traits such as rugged individualism, kinship with nature, masculine strength, self-empowerment and self-determination which distinguish a popular American character.

In the mythic narrative, the hunter-hero enters the wilderness to engage an animal avatar in a violent contest for domination and spiritual empowerment. The struggle develops into an intimate kinship as the hunter-hero forgoes his familial, societal home and enters a new world into which he must assimilate and with which he must identify in order to attain the skills needed to defeat the beast. After an initiation culminating his education in navigating the space and comprehending the animal from its tracks, the hunter locates and engages the foremost beast in a violent embrace that merges their identities and consummates the union of man and nature. In the climax, the hunter slays the beast and achieves spiritual regeneration as well as dominion over the environment. Richard Slotkin's *Regeneration Through Violence* acts as a central authority on the mythology of the American frontier, and his understanding of the hunter-hero provides the cultural and literary historical foundation for this thesis. But unlike other criticism using similar cultural/historical approaches, my analysis develops *Blood Meridian's* significance as a work of literature, toward conclusions bearing on an artistic tradition. My focus on the hunter-hero myth, its history and context, locates a basis for the structures and thematic preoccupations of *Moby-Dick*, "The Bear," and *Blood Meridian*.

The hunter myth, identified by Slotkin, articulates a regenerative power of violent transgression that justifies and validates recurrent cruelties as ends in themselves, the act of killing containing a spiritual value independent from material rewards like pelts and money

or in furthering colonial goals. The hunter myth allowed Americans a desirable resolution for the synthesis of a new society and in the project of expansionism, portraying a distinct American character asserting the national values. Yet such mythology did not necessarily contain the ideological motivations for colonialism and may have left major political and cultural motivations for expansion out from its narrative, such as widespread doctrines of racism. These mythologies simplify and distill larger political and cultural environments to make narratives that easily explain complex situations, popular histories that continue to motivate the behavior they sought to gloss over. As Slotkin declares: "artists like Melville and Faulkner earlier prophesize[d] that myths reach out of the past to cripple, incapacitate, or strike down the living."[10] The hunting stories Melville and Faulkner tell recognize such destructive power of myths, distinguishing their hunter-heroes in the frontier tradition. These two works of literature embrace rather than seek to transcend the political, cultural, and historical forces in recognizing how an adherence to myths can lead one toward their own doom. In resisting alignment with similar societal forces, *Blood Meridian* stands apart for attempting to rewrite the myth as separate from the discourse on American history while also demonstrating its awareness of the destructive ideologies attending it.

American Definition

As intermediating between the worlds on either side of the frontier, the hunter-hero stood as a mythic figure offering one definition of distinct American identity in the nation's struggle to synthesize the old and new world in creating one wholly new. D.H. Lawrence in

[10] Richard Slotkin, Richard. *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier 1600-1860* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973), 5.

his *Studies in Classic American Literature* describes the American as a writhing snake, shedding its European skin while trying to grow a new skin underneath.[11] This process, as Lawrence tracks it through James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales, makes the American "a torn divided monster," struggling out of the old-world traditions and creating new values in the self.[12] American mythology developed to reassure and prophesize that the suffering would not be in vain. Rather, engagement with the frontier connected one with the ideal, allowing pioneers to reach heights unattainable in the east and certainly not in an overcrowded, increasingly industrial Europe. Whether that reward meant spiritual conversion, the exorcism of demons, the slaying of the wilderness avatar, or the city upon a hill, the frontier myths rededicated succeeding generations to the project of America expansion. To go west and light out for the territories, Americans followed the myths to pursue the limits of the land, knowledge, and control.

While the hunter-hero figure extends far back into human history, the myth emerges to prominence in America after its revolution. Americans now stood on more secure ground than their Puritan ancestors who survived in settlements besieged by wilderness. Whereas the Indigenous people saw their surroundings as their home, hunting and fishing grounds, Anglo settlers now could perceive of the land as nature, an unexplored wilderness to be conquered. Expansion had pushed the frontier westward, and the whole of society did not contend with the frontier realities that gave captivity narratives such relevance before. With independence, the need for a social identity became even more prominent as a search for a national character to justify a people upon the strange continent. The hunter-hero likewise stands

[11] D.H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977): 58.
[12] Ibid, 58.

innocent and unnamed, the wilderness working as a site of his practical and spiritual education, the hunt separating the child from the man. As Slotkin shows in John Filson's fiction, the novels that popularized Daniel Boone, the hunter discovers a growing sense of his true nature through his time on the frontier.[13] Relocating in an unfamiliar world, the hunter learns to locate himself and the wilderness itself, learns to read tracks and translate prints into an animal's larger behavior patterns. Through ordering the world, the mythic hunter achieves self-possession and a clear identity. "Because of his understanding of the laws of life in the woods, he can impose an order of his own on events," Slotkin writes, "employing the best of both Puritan and Indian cultures for his own benefit."[14] The hunter emerges out of two worlds as now a master over both, possessing a culture distinct from either society from whence he came.

As America grew westward, the recurring frontier experience produced and distilled an image of the hunter. Since the existential threat of survival had passed and engagement with the frontier had proved productive, a new mythology distinct from "the devilish and pagan wilderness" started to emerge in popular literature. With men like Benjamin Church, who followed the frontier each time the boundary moved further, a frontiersman image started to distill into a character with a new relationship to the wilderness. Church felt drawn spiritually as well as economically towards the natural world and invested his characters with a love for what had previously been feared. Slotkin recognizes the restless western pursuit as a nomadic pattern that typified frontier life and represented a cleavage from the Puritan mindset exalting "a permanent, settled dwelling place, close to 'the institutions of God" as

[13] Richard Slotkin, Richard. *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier 1600-1860* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973), 289.
[14] Ibid, 161.

"the first necessity of moral government" along with shinning upon a hill as the holy motivation for crossing the Atlantic.[15] Lacking the zealotry of contemporary Puritan writers like Cotton Mather, Church recognized and celebrated human agency in his heroes who best Indian foes rather than exorcize "evil savages" through the will of God. Church created the prototype for what later would become the American hunter-hero. Slotkin characterizes this archetype by his ability to assimilate into the Wilderness, overcome its nature and his foes; an individualism from civilized society and a self-possession in "savage" lands; an identification with and admiration of Indian peoples; and a heroism empowered through acts of violence.

Developing from Church's narratives, the hunter-hero became a celebrated self-assertion of nationhood, a character that reached to and circulated throughout Europe exemplifying Americanness. The hunter-hero emerged as the popular manifestations unifying European heritage with North American clay. Judge Hall, a popular western writer, assigned Daniel Boone as the symbol of western character, having to regionalize a national character into four unreconcilable personalities.[16] Yet Hall elevates the West as "the ground on which the essential qualities of the American character emerge from the crust of habit and custom built up in the more settled East."[17] Although representing only a small proportion of American society at any one time, Daniel Boone or the hunter-hero universalizes as the resulting portrait when old and new, civilized and natural merge on the frontier. Brain W. Dippie supports Hall's locating the frontier as the defining ground of national character: "Obviously, the recentness of civilization's penetration into the wilderness went a long way

[15] Ibid, 157.
[16] Ibid, 406.
[17] Ibid, 407.

toward explaining the differences between the American and European, the former progressive, the latter stagnant and time-bound."[18] Westward from mere foot holds like Jamestown, America experienced frontier life at some point nearly everywhere. And to extend Hall, Daniel Boone in one form or another emerged, lived and died countless times between the two coasts. For at each meridian of confrontation, the violent contest offered Americans to redefine and renew its national character.

The American moved as a generative and destructive force, active in labor against primordial forces, and as a result clarified himself and developed settlements in an experiment to reform and energize decadent European society, generating something ideal. Many occupations involved this process, but the hunter-hero encountered the wilderness first in the avant-garde of civilization, learned to perceive the primordial world, and translated it back conceptually and materially. But unfamiliar and unoriented to the wild, the hunter-hero had to experience an initiation that required an indigenous education. To survive, navigate, track and hunt, the hunter-hero depended on the Native American. And in symbolic terms, the 'Indian' offered the hunter a means to reconcile himself with the New World. By assimilating the 'Indian' culture, the hunter could not only learn to survive in the strange land but also take ownership over it. His mastery of the wilderness justifies his existence in it and, often, his superiority over the people inhabiting it. The hunter's conversion to 'Indian' ways grants him the power to destroy them,

[18] Brian W. Dippie, *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Policy* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1982), 16.

Native Mirror

Being self-possessed enough to resist temptation, the hunter-hero could assimilate into Indian society and learn the way of the hunt which, once perfected, would allow him to overcome nature and 'Indian' both to become master over the land. Mastery over the land would offer the settlers a justification for their presence upon a strange continent, justifying their motivations and efforts to establish settlement upon the Western hemisphere. The mythology seeks not only to differentiate the America from the Old World, but also reconcile him with the New World. The latter necessitates that the captivity narrative inverts, the hunter offering himself willingly as a captive to the Indian world with the white woman remaining with civilization, a reconciliation of society and wilderness following the culmination of the hunter-hero's narrative. Such stands as an unsurprising reversal of power relations considering America's growth as Anglo-Americans began to considered themselves no longer the victim of the wilderness but the aggressor against them. From such position, popular imagination recognized the Indian with greater familiarity and even envy.

Lacking any true reality, the "Indian" as a literary figure exists only for white society and bears little upon the peoples indigenous to America. Instead, the Indian represents a projected inversion of European society and reflects the anxieties involved in the American project. In enforcing western propriety and Christian devotion in the New World, the Puritans saw savagery and evil in Indian society as evidence to uphold their institutions and to justify taking Indigenous land and killing and, in some cases, enslaving Indigenous people. While the representation of the 'Indian' as a barbarian persisted, Anglo-Americans began to recognize aspects of 'Indian' society as a noble alternative to Europe. In both the Boston Tea Party and Whiskey Rebellion, Americans engaged in rebellion in the costume of the Indian to

protest old-world oppression and the corruption of the economic system. In balancing two worlds to form a definite American character, Anglo society looked to Indian society as a counter weight to European society. Brian W. Dippie asserts in *Vanishing American* that "without a past of its own, America lacked moral grandeur, its character remained distressingly two-dimensional; thus the desire to locate indigenous roots… a heritage uniquely American. The Indian, as the First American, was necessary to any such attempt at self-definition."[19] American self-assertion involved a framework that defined its "cultural identity through negative means" as Slotkin charts from the Puritans onward. But the national mythology often saw a rejection of one world through a positive aspect in the other.[20] As during the ugly process of industrialization, American society romanticized Native People's naturalism and less materialistic society. Consequently, the representation of the Native American changed in character as the country grew, from heathen devil to noble ghost, from immense scourge to mournful survivor, reflecting both the hope and shame for national progress.

The hunter-hero's narrative centers on his initiation, a self-creation, as only Americans could imagine one's birth as an expression of rugged individualism. And his coming-to-age reenacts American history in the exiling of oneself from home and society to make himself over in the wilderness which offers spiritual and physical strength. In entering the Indian world, the hunter-hero must first repudiate civilized society to experience its antithesis. Richard Slotkin writes that "in the mythology derived from the Indian wars, the Indian is the representative of a culture and a social order that offers a radical alternative to

[19] Ibid, 16.
[20] Richard Slotkin, Richard. *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier 1600-1860* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973): 22.

the established order of Euro-American society."[21] Indian society provides the hunter with an alternative lifestyle, ancestry, and kinship. Slotkin identifies the hunter-hero' assimilation of Indigenous belief: "the mythology surrounding hunters like Boone, in particular, had shown strong resemblances to Indian myths."[22] In particular, the Delaware creation myth among several other Indigenous cultures recognize the hunter as the central hero of creation. The Delaware mythic hero escapes from the underworld where humanity lives, climbs himself out from earth's womb and emerges to sunlight. The hunter kills a deer, and the meat he shares with his people motivates society to settle upon the surface. The hunting quest, Slotkin asserts, stands then as the metaphor for human birth as well as the birth of the human race itself. [23]

Unlike the Garden of Eden story, the Delaware myth seems to emphasize a willing of self to higher existence, a searching and a discovering instead of awaking to plentiful life as Adam does. Latent birth, rugged individualism, transgression of boundary, and entrance into a new world: the Delaware myth so understood encapsulates the major elements of the American hunter-hero. The myth does not include a banishment and exile from Eden, a divine curse that separated humanity from the land, which may explain why Anglo-America imagines Indigenous life as harmonious with the natural world. Such idealized kinship with the wilderness obsesses the hunter-hero mythology, rearticulates the hunter's violence as a loving act, the hunt becoming a marriage between man and nature.

Throughout his initiation, the hunter nurtures a kinship with the wilderness avatar, whether Indian or animal, involving an adopting of the other's ways, learning their skills, and

[21] Ibid, 558.
[22] Ibid, 358.
[23] Ibid, 306.

exchanging identities. The hunter-hero begins to love his prey and grows deeper into a harmony with the New World. And with the Indian, the hunter-hero develops in some cases a profound connection, a romance D.H. Lawrence calls a mere "wish-fulfillment vision" only possible in fiction as he describes Cooper's portrayal of friendship across the frontier: "Cooper dreamed a new human relationship. A stark, stripped human relationship of two men, deeper than the deeps of sex. Deeper than property, deeper than fatherhood, deeper than marriage, deeper than love. So deep that it is loveless. The stark, loveless, wordless union of two men who have come to the bottom of themselves."[24] Lawrence mocks Cooper's sentiment because he sees such a relationship as glaring unreality, impossible for Cooper, who is not capable of making any sacrifice for it. While Anglo society idealized a new American race born out on the continent, white Americans "balked at the idea of the creation of a 'Mongrel' America,"[25] Reginald Horsman asserts in *Race and Manifest Destiny*, which would threaten the ascendancy of Anglo-Saxon culture. Any stability where both Indian and Anglo society could survive together necessitates a curtailing of the American enterprise, which rapidly undermined the material and societal basis for many Indigenous societies that coincidentally centered on the wilderness and animals that hunter-hero clears out. So, the hunter continues to destroy that which he loves, assimilating the animal's power through violence, for otherwise civilization will displace him just the same.

[24] D.H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 58.
[25] Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1981), 302.

A Forcing of Destiny

Negotiating this dialogue between the two societies from which America emerged, the hunter-hero crossed the borderlands, relinquishing Western society and "powers of civilized law and order," to immerse himself in the alternative Indigenous/natural world until assuming the skills that enable him to slay the beast. The hunter proves his mastery of the wilderness and animal in becoming the aggressor capable of locating and overcoming the beast. Moreover, the hunter shows himself capable outside of settled society to sustain his necessities and even to triumph against the greatest threat, achieving domination over the space. The resulting figure exists as a higher being through the wilderness, refining the society he left to its essential features and assuming the positive traits gained from the Indians while resisting their perceived corruptions. The myth solves the conflict between two worlds, striking a balance in between that creates a distinct American character who has mastered the land on which an ideal society can be built. Yet such future society will have no need for a hunter-hero and will bypass the function that such hero serves. So, the hunter-hero in preforming his heroic purpose, thereby entails his own demise by destroying the wilderness whose primitivism motivates his participation with it.

The climax allows the hunter to culminate and realize his identity. The marriage to the animal or Indian that develops in the course of the hunt, a union progressing in understanding and identifying the other, consummates in the killing which symbolically reconciles hunter and prey, Slotkin asserts.[26] Spiritually, physically, and sexually man and beast embrace in the act of killing, becoming one in the last violent struggle, and become one

[26] Richard Slotkin, Richard. *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier 1600-1860* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973), 553.

in the living man who draws the vitality out from the animal to empower himself. The reward is spiritual and not material, the flesh only usable for the hunter-hero as trophies, so Slotkin identifies the action of killing carrying the value and purpose behind the hunt. [27] Shooting a buffalo qualified as sport with hunters uninterested in neither the material or spiritual aspects of the animal. The myth necessitated violence for self-definition, destroying the natural power of the wilderness in the beast or his mirror in the Indian.

Beyond the frontier, the myth persisted. And violence and death became a beautiful dance that only a true hunter could recognize. In *Death in the Afternoon*, Ernest Hemingway criticizes bullfighters who do not push their swords in as deep as they should: "This practice…is what has robbed killing of its emotion since the beauty of the moment of killing is that flash when man and bull form one figure as the sword goes all the way in, the man leaning after it, death uniting the two figures in the emotional, aesthetic and artistical climax of the fight. That flash never comes in the skillful administering of a half blade to the bull."[28] What motivates the narrative of *Moby-Dick* is a similar failure of violence: Ahab's inability to kill Moby Dick when they first meet and the wound he receives that binds his person and purpose to the life of a beast for closure and fulfillment.

Chapter 2: Moby Dick

The hunter-hero myth pervades *Moby-Dick* in its central hunt for a legendary whale, Ahab's symbolic marriage to his prey, and Ishmael's initiation into the whaling world.

[27] Ibid, 556.
[28] Ernest Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon* (New York: Scrivener, 2003), 247.

Although a tale set upon the sea, the whaling novel engages with the frontier tradition on a significant and sustained basis. Melville recognizes aspects of the hunter-hero in the principal characters, colors his descriptions of the sea with frontier imagery, and expands upon tropes and themes central to the mythic hunting narrative. The initiation foundation of the hunter-hero myth structures *Moby-Dick* as Ishmael enters a unfamiliar wilderness, participates in a catalog of rituals, and becomes himself an intermediary between society and the wilderness. Melville critically subverts the hunting symbolic order in the novel so that the implications underlying the myth rise to the surface and become clearer. Richard Slotkin asserts that *Moby-Dick* extends beyond popular mythology— which "serves as a gloss for the painful or troubling aspects of a people's history"— to reach a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the myth.[29] In the first half of "The Bear," Faulkner imitates the conventionalized hunter-hero myth as it serves Ike's naïve perspective, avoiding the violent implications and absurdity of the "yearly paegent-rite of the old bear's furious immortality."[30] Faulkner first engages the conventions of the myth before building to a more complex and critical portrayal of it across the novella. In contrast, Melville begins *Moby-Dick* with a reconsidered interpretation of the frontier myth that intensifies, more so than metamorphizes as in "The Bear," over the novel's course.

Agrarian Freebooting Impressions

The first and obvious obstacle in linking *Moby-Dick* with the hunter-hero myth is that the novel takes place on the sea rather than the frontier. As Emanuel Leutz titled his great painting "Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way," (1860, U.S. Capital), American

[29] Richard Slotkin, Richard. *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier 1600-1860* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973), 550.
[30] William Faulkner, "The Bear" in Go Down, Moses (New York: Vintage International, 1942): 183.

expansion involved the limitless and terrestrial West: prairies, woods, four-legged animals, pioneers and indigenous tribes. The *Pequod* instead sails east toward the coast of Japan, portrays islanders of the South Seas, and the myriad zoology of underwater creatures. Yet the frontier invests Melville's project on a grand scale. In his analysis of *Moby-Dick*, Richard Slotkin catalogs the frontier imagery that appears in the novel:

> Moby Dick has a forehead like 'the prairie' and a hump like a buffalo; the sea is also called 'prairie,' 'meadow,' and 'desert'; whaleman snatch their harpoons from the crotch as quickly 'as a backwoodsman swings his rifle from the wall'; the whale is compared to the 'White Steed' in the popular fiction of western magazines"; and 'your true whale hunter is as much a savage as an Iroquois.[31]

Slotkin shows that Melville clearly had the Western wilderness on his mind while writing *Moby-Dick* or at least popular images of the frontier. In chapter forty-five "The Affidavit," Melville makes a specific reference to Benjamin Church, the aforementioned author who first depicted the hunter-hero as a character distinct from Puritan literature:

> [Legendary whales], after at various times creating great havoc among the boats of different vessels, were finally gone in quest of, systematically hunted out, chased and killed by valiant whale captains, who heaved up their anchors with that express object as much in view, as in setting out through the Narragansett Woods, Captain Church of old had it in his mind to capture that notorious murderous savage Annawon, the headmost warrior of the Indian King Phillip.[32]

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[31] Richard Slotkin, Richard. *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier 1600-1860* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973), 543

[32] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; Or, The Whale*, ed. Herschel Parker and Harrison Hayford, (New York: Norton & Company, 2002): 172.

Here, Melville makes a direct connection between the hunter-hero tradition and whaling, alluding to the literary father of the hunter-hero tradition no less in the hunting of Indigenous people as an analog for Ahab's quest for the white whale.

In the opening chapter "Loomings," when Ishmael speaks about the crowds enthralled by the sea, Melville articulates a central theme that engages the rest of the book: that of the relationship between people and unsettled space, the frontier between the settled and the possible, and the strange magnetism in between. Melville locates "in the land-locked heart of our America…agrarian freebooting impressions popularly connected with the open ocean" that motivate the desire to set sail or light out for the territories, the tremendous movement of Americans east or west. [33] But Melville also engages the glaring aspect of violence that underlies American expansion in most its forms. Whether in wars with other states, wars against peoples, wars against nature, violence is ubiquitous in the actions of creation from mining to farming to hunting. But what is not apparent is whether these selected images reveal a thematic linkage between Melville and the frontier or merely an aesthetic one. Like *Blood Meridian*, *Moby-Dick* carries a large and diverse bibliography, literary and historical, and is often described as an encyclopedic novel. Consequently, this thesis will follow Ahab's advice to Starbuck— "thou requirest a little lower layer"[34] — and plumb deeper into the novel's context and structure.

By the 1850s, America had acquired Texas and the Mexican Cession, increasing the territory of the United States by a fourth and prompting numerous Americans to head west to settle the new land. The tensions between free states and slave states over the fate of these

[33] Ibid, 201.
[34] Ibid, 141.

new lands were growing increasingly violent. Melville published *Moby-Dick* in 1851, just three years following the conclusion of the Mexican-American War. The Texas and Mexican conflicts appear in both "Nantucket" and "Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish," chapters that reverberate with national questions about imperialist conquest. "Let America add Mexico upon Texas and pile Cuba upon Canada…for the sea is [the Nantucketer's]; he owns it, as Emperors own empires."[35] While this chapter humorously galvanizes whale men, it nevertheless aligns whaling with other American attempts at imperialism in the focus on conquest and ownership. "The aggressive spirit of the law of the American whaleships," McWilliams proposes regarding *Fast-Fish*, "is an exaggeration—or maybe even a prophecy— of the nation's future."[36] And before Melville wrote *Moby-Dick*, the biblical Ahab was routinely invoked by American politicians expressing their fears about Manifest Destiny. Alan Heimert asserts, "So common was the likening of American invasion of other nations' rights to Ahab's aggressions that by 1848 James Russell Lowell, attacking the Mexican War in the Biglow Papers, saw no need to amplify when he alluded in his notes to 'neighbor Naboths,'" the people under the biblical Ahab.[37] And the connection between Ahab and American Expansionism manifests in the novel when Ishmael describes Ahab: "But those wild eyes met his, as the bloodshot eyes of the prairie wolves meet the eyes of their leader ere he rushes on at their head in the trail of the bison; but, alas! only to fall into the hidden trap of the Indian."[38] Here Melville locates Ahab on the frontier, in pursuit of American hunting prey, and toward a doomed fate.

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[35] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*. (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 55.
[36] Susan McWilliams, "Ahab, American," in *A Political Companion to Herman Melville*, ed. Jason Frank (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 2013), 129.
[37] Alan Heimert, "Moby Dick and American Political Symbolism," *American Quarterly* 15, no.4 (1963): 503.
[38] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; Or, The Whale*, ed. Herschel Parker and Harrison Hayford, (New York: Norton & Company, 2002): 141.

Melville, in the first chapter, repositions the American public to face East, imbuing the sea with a romanticism characteristic of the West. In Ishmael's explanation of why he takes to the sea, one sees the mythic promises offered by the frontier and the new world itself, a value Melville symbolizes in the gold doubloon Ahab advertises as a reward for sighting Moby Dick. The ocean provides physical and spiritual regeneration, "wholesome exercise and pure air," and a cure for "hypos" and "a damp, drizzly November in one's soul."[39] Ishmael articulates an obsession that he sees among "landsmen; of week days pent up in lath and plaster—tied to counters, nailed to benches, clinched to desks" for the sea, the freedom and energy it symbolizes.[40] Ishmael cites economic, artistic, and adventurous desires for casting off on the open ocean. He explains the enthrallment for the sea of the crowds he sees on the shore: "Nothing will content them but the extremest limit of the land… Inlanders all, they come from lanes and alleys, streets and avenues—north, east, south, and west. Yet here they all unite. Tell me, does the magnetic virtue of the needles of the compasses of all those ships attract them thither?"[41] Melville here aligns the impulse and hope of Manifest Destiny with the ocean, a people united by curiosity and exploration for unconsummated space.

Moby-Dick is full of images reflective of the Western frontier, most notably in passage which Ishmael describes a white steed:

> A magnificent milk-white charger, large-eyed, small-headed, bluff-chested.…whose pastures in those days were only fenced by the Rocky Mountains and the Alleghanies….A most imperial and archangelical apparition of that unfallen, western

[39] Ibid, 19-20.
[40] Ibid, 19.
[41] Ibid, 19.

> world, which to the eyes of the old trappers and hunters revived the glories of those primeval times when Adam walked majestic as a god….In whatever aspect he presented himself, always to the bravest Indians he was the object of trembling reverence and awe [while] at the same time enforced a certain nameless terror.[42]

Melville draws clearly on the hunter-hero mythology here, glorifying the virgin and untainted landscape as a New Eden and positioning the frontiersman as Adam. The hunter is a special witness to this paradise whose trade offers him access to see what Indigenous people hold sacred, a natural world that is pure, heroic, and sublime. The white steed reflects the white whale. The swelling sea reminds Ahab of a rolling prairie just as Melville, in letters composed as he wrote the novel, likens the sight of a snow-covered prairie to feeling as though one was on a ship overlooking the sea.[43] The white steed is "a most imperial and archangel apparition" just as Moby Dick accrues descriptions as a phantom, sphinx, and king. Melville here recognizes a terrestrial counterpart for Moby Dick with a comparable stature as an avatar of the wilderness.

Ishmael develops through various chapters on cetology the sublime power of the whale. In *The Tail*, Ishmael asserts, "No ribs of man or boat can withstand it" and "for as the mightiest elephant is but a terrier to Leviathan."[44] And in *The Battering-Ram*, he asks the reader to "abide by this; that though the sperm whale stove a passage through the Isthmus of Darien…you would not elevate one hair of your eye brow," establishing a supreme standard by which the reader should regard the whale.[45] Ishmael thereby develops the sperm whale

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[42] Ibid, 158.
[43] Melville, Herman. *Correspondence: The Writings of Herman Melville*, ed. Stanley T. Williams, Leon Howard, Harrison Hayford, vol.14, 1993, Northwestern University Press and The Newberry Library.
[44] Ibid, 313.
[45] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*. (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 2002): 281.

into an embodiment of the force of nature, a nobility of the 'lawless' sea of which Moby Dick is foremost, the avatar of the wilderness. Against whalers armed with only harpoons, the white whale offers an opportunity for combat between a powerful force of nature and humanity with a largely primitive capacity. Rather than guns or other instruments of technology, the *Pequod* tracks Moby Dick in a hunt that is both more difficult and dangerous than those in the American wilderness at such time.

Although similar to hunting narratives on the American frontier, Melville poses whaling as an imperial venture in which the killed whale becomes a conquered space in the sea, a signal of human dominance and habitation. As Leo Marx asserts, "In *Moby-Dick* space is the sea—a sea repeatedly depicted in images of the American landscape, [in which] the conquest of the whale was a type of [the American] fated conquest of nature itself."[46] The killed Right Whale is, as Ishmael paints in *Of The Less Erroneous…*, "a conquered fortress, with the flag of capture lazily hanging from the whale-pole inserted into his spout hole."[47] With the notion of whaling as a form of expansionism, Ishmael's claim that the Nantucket whale men had "overrun and conquered the watery world like so many Alexanders; parceling out among them the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian oceans" becomes comprehendible.[48] Whaling as "a butchery sort of business" becomes synonymous in Melville with conquest and with American nationalism. Ishmael proclaims the superiority of American whalers globally and that only American ships have made a habit of purusing Sperm Whales to violent ends. Ishmael asks near the end of *Brit* to consider the "universal cannibalism of the sea; all whose creatures prey upon each other, carrying on eternal war since the world

[46] Leo Marx, "The Machine in the Garden," *The New England Quarterly*, vol. 29, no.1 (1956): 41.
[47] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*. (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 2002): 224.
[48] Ibid, 54.

began."[49] In this realm of violence, Americans have achieved unparalleled success and the foremost hunter among them, Ahab, captains "a cannibal of a craft" on a quest to slay the all-powerful Moby Dick. Through such symbolic reconciliation of hunter and prey, Melville recognizes a thematic strain that centers the hunter-hero tradition and engaged *Moby-Dick* with the mythology of the frontier.

Schoolmasters to Sailors

In *Moby-Dick*, Melville engages and reenacts the mythical American project in which diverse people unite together in a conquest of nature, which amounts to a definition and assertion of selfhood. The *Pequod*'s quest involves Ahab's overcoming the supreme natural power and Ishmael's assembling a narrative which gives the hunt context and significance. Melville does not only tell a mythic hunting story, but also tells a story about the creation of myth. He transcends the conventional hunter-hero narrative by building out his own lexicon, structures of order and value.

As we have seen, Captain Ahab aligns with the imagery and aims of westward expansionism in his quest to gain control over nature. He hunts a singular creature, one powerful and legendary, that fulfills the function of the wilderness avatar. And slaying Moby Dick amounts for Ahab to a spiritual rejuvenation which he pursues relentlessly. Yet, Ahab does not resemble the hunter-hero as conventionally depicted. Ahab is not a novitiate, neither to a new world nor the hunting trade, and his quest does not involve his initiation. Prior to the beginning of the novel, Ahab's hunting quest had failed, which resulted in the losing of his leg and the denial of the self-creation offered by the myth. Ahab then desires redemption

[49] Ibid, 230.

through slaying Moby Dick, the restoration of himself and revenge upon the whale that destabilized his self-hood. Rather than on the verge of manhood, Ahab comes on stage as a character who has been dispossessed, a part of his identity stripped away from him both physically and symbolically.

Ahab amounts to a perversion of the hunter-hero as popularly depicted, possessing little of the redeeming features while embodying the underlying implications that haunt the archetype. While finding a basis in and still engaging with the hunter-hero, Melville creates a violent and demonic hunter in Captain Ahab. Rather than exemplifying self-reliance and strength, Ahab stands as a destabilized and disabled tyrant who enlists a whole crew to carry out the task that he can no longer preform himself. Having been maimed in harpooning the whale, Ahab passes the task of slaying Moby Dick to the three harpooners Tashtego, Daggoo, and Queequeg. Ahab employs these three non-white, non-Western men for their capacity in killing and does not seek to assimilate or learn their culture in the slightest. For Ahab is the priest and not the initiate; he lacks Ike's curiosity to learn an alternative mode of living and instead imposes his world vision on everyone else: "It was that accursed whale that razeed me; made a poor pegging lubber of me for ever and a day….And this is what ye have shipped for men! to chase the white whale…till he spouts black blood and rolls fin out."[50] Ahab binds the whole crew on his personal quest for revenge, preparing a whole catalog of rituals for the task.

As in "The Bear" where hunting Old Ben becomes "the yearly pageant-rite of the old bear's furious immortality," the whaling voyage in *Moby-Dick* transcends material and

[50] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*. (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 139.

economic concerns into a higher realm of significance. In Faulkner's novel, Sam Fathers presides as the priest who has converted the hunt from a leisure activity into a spiritual quest for Major De Spain's party. Through his immersion in nature, noble Chickasaw heritage, and isolation from "civilized" society, Sam Fathers acts as an intercessor between the plantation society and the wilderness. Ahab likewise stands as a priest and the master of rituals in the hunt for Moby Dick. In "the Quarter Deck," Ahab assembles the crew upon the deck and leads a ceremony that transforms the objective, symbols, and values of the hunt. Rather than hunting any manner of whales for profit, Ahab declares they hunt a single whale Moby Dick and holds up a Spanish doubloon as a unique currency for sighting it. The doubloon "was of purest, virgin gold, raked out of the heart of gorgeous hills" in South America, and the crew "revered it as the white whale's talisman."[51] Ahab gives Moby Dick a value beyond its material worth for the crew.

The rituals Ahab oversees all serve to augment his own power to kill the whale, uniting the crew and wedding them to his singular pursuit: "To accomplish his object Ahab must use tools; and of all tools used in the shadow of the moon, men are most apt to get out of order."[52] Among physical, political, and linguistic tools, hunting rituals stand out in Ahab's program for enthralling the crew in the hunt for Moby Dick like some leader of a cult. In "The Quarter Deck" Ahab passes around a flagon of rum "hot as Satan's hoof" that "spiralizes" in the crew and "forks out at the serpent-snapping eye." [53] Here, Ahab shares the elixir of chivalric tales which is "charged" with his hatred gained from battling the white

[51] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; Or, The Whale*, ed. Herschel Parker and Harrison Hayford, (New York: Norton & Company, 2002): 332.
[52] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; Or, The Whale*, ed. Herschel Parker and Harrison Hayford, (New York: Norton & Company, 2002): 177.
[53] Ibid, 141.

whale. Faulkner uses the same technique although his elixir aligns with a different conception of the hunt: "That brown liquor which not women, not boys and children, but only hunters drank…some condensation of the wild immortal spirit, drinking it moderately, humbly even, not with the pagan's base and hopeless hope of acquiring thereby the virtues…but in salute to them."[54] Ahab hurries the crew to drink deep and fast, calling the steward to refill the flagon which reveals little concern for saluting the wilderness spirit, but of consumption and mastery over his crew. Faulkner presents a hunting mythology that Ike slowly and humbly learns; Melville shows Ahab forcing his vision down the throats of his crew. In the next ritual, reviving "a noble custom of my fisherman fathers before me," Ahab has his three harpooners salute him with crossed harpoons.[55] This classical and theatric oath, Melville invokes to recognize Ahab with Western ceremonies of allegiance, a tradition he subverts by making Ahab a satanic figure who baptizes the harpooners later 'not in the name of the father, but in the name of the devil.' Throughout Melville's engagement with the hunter-hero, he perverts and subverts the ideology that the myth rests upon.

In contrast to hunters of many indigenous mythologies, the American hunter-hero slays the avatar of the wilderness in the fulfillment of his initiation. The spiritual power and energy contained within the beast serve as the hunter's aim and reward upon slaying the creature, the blood ritual consecrating his mastery over the wilderness. For the Blackfoot people, Joseph Campbell explains, "the Buffalo Dance properly preformed insures that the creatures slaughter shall be giving only their bodies, not their essence."[56] The ritual

[54] William Faulkner, "The Bear" in Go Down, Moses (New York: Vintage International, 1942): 182.
[55] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; Or, The Whale*, ed. Herschel Parker and Harrison Hayford, (New York: Norton & Company, 2002): 142.
[56] Edward F. Edinger, "The Meaning of the Whale," in *Critical Essays on Herman Melville's Moby-Dick*, ed. Brian Higgins and Herschel Parker (New York: G. K. Hall & Co.): 472.

safeguards the Blackfoot hunters from exploiting the animals for their spirits and understands the hunt as an observance of sacrifice, a gift of sustenance received from nature. Edward F. Edinger asserts that "it was considered safe [for the Blackfoot tribes] to kill particular buffaloes only if the reverent relation to the 'great buffalo' is maintained."[57] The avatar of the wilderness in this case stands supreme as in the American hunting mythos, yet such mythic animal acts as the god-head of nature and therefore left untouched.

The satanic character of Ahab's rituals recognizes the transgression at the heart of the American deviation of the hunting myth. As "one of the fundamental meanings" of the quest, Edinger recognizes Ahab's "assault on Moby Dick as an assault on the very concept of the sacred."[58] For hunting the avatar of the wilderness stands as a siege of the wilderness entire; deposing its god will destroy the very source of natural life. Richard Slotkin calls Ahab's quest "a compounded violation of nature." [59] The phrase fits here in the sense that Ahab's slaying of Moby Dick amounts to striking at the root of the natural world and collapsing nature into ruin. As opposed to the protagonists of the American hunter-hero tradition developed from Filson and present in Faulkner, Ahab lacks love and reverence toward the wilderness. Thus, he has no qualms about condemning the natural world in his avenging quest. "Talk not to me of blasphemy, man," Ahab roars to Starbuck, "I'd strike the sun if it insulted me."[60] Within the realm of the possibility, Ahab declares his capacity to knock out the source of all earthy life if ever defied. "Ahab sees the whale…as the embodiment or agent outside the physical world of visible nature….in orthodox Christian theology both God

[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid, 473
[59] Richard Slotkin, Richard. *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier 1600-1860* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973): 545.
[60] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; Or, The Whale*, ed. Herschel Parker and Harrison Hayford, (New York: Norton & Company, 2002): 14.

and the devil are such powers, in conflict; but here it seems uncertain from his own words which one Ahab (clearly unorthodox) is attacking as evilly responsible for his own sufferings and those of mankind."[61] Such uncertainty drives one of the central dynamics of *Moby-Dick*—whether the white whale is either a transcendent force or only a dumb beast. Melville asks the reader to choose between the myth and the events of the novel, whether to participate in the narrative that Ishmael inclines us to invest ourselves in.

Rather than an initiation, which in the hunter-hero myth involves a productive reconciliation between two systems of orders, Ahab's quest is one of restoration and revenge. Seeking not only a recovery of what he has lost, Ahab expects that killing the whale will also reward him with powers beyond he once possessed. Ike abandons the tainting tools of western society when entering the wilderness. Ahab mobilizes all manners of technology and corrupt practices in his destruction of nature. In this, Melville strikes at the foundations of the hunter-hero myth and its resonances within the national myth by framing the hunt as a purely egotistic pursuit motivated solely by hate and murder rather than by respect for the avatar. For if Ahab only re-enacts the quest that had previously wounded him, augmenting but not changing his approach, his endeavor is self-defeating. The initiation, through which the hunter is partly converted by the wilderness, provides an alternative mode of being which corrects and augments the corrupted aspects of "civilized society."

In hunter-hero narratives, the obstacle of the wilderness is overcome through the knowledge and instruction of "Indian" societies. The conversion or decivilizing initiation augments the hunter's capabilities and leads him to total mastery. Although Ahab enlists

[61] Ibid, 140 note 6.

"indigenous" islanders in his revenge quest, he does not open himself up to a new mode of being, instead doubling down and assembling all the tools at his disposal. With an eye to the national myth, the old-world European corruptions of tyranny and oppression reassert themselves in the character of Ahab. No relinquishment of such happens, thereby the purifying process cannot occur. Ahab's second quest does not fundamentally differ from the first and likewise cannot succeed, ending only in doom.

Melville in *Moby-Dick* probes the national hunter-hero narrative and reconceives the expression of its fundamental ideas. Ahab represents a new vision of the hunter-hero which stands antithetical to the popular depiction of the myth, instead standing as a terrifying and satanic American "hero." Sublime egoism, tyrannical mobilization, and violence of the highest brutality characterize Ahab. Not fully mindless violence, Ahab defines his quest in enigmatic and cosmic terms as a legendary struggle between man and beast. For those unmotivated by his "wailing cry" or platonic reasoning, Ahab preforms a catalog of chivalric rituals to unite the crew in his personal monomaniacal vengeance. Infused with satanic imagery, such rituals reveal and seek to impart upon the crew Ahab's own bottomless and singular hate of that which defied him and the world Moby Dick seemingly supports.

Ahab harbors no love for the natural world nor any desire to engage in an alternative mode of being. Therefore, Ahab does not engage in a process of initiation and true communion with wild ocean. His quest is solely an attempt to slay a wild beast, neither an advancement of civilization nor a purifying reconciliation. Yet in his violent endeavor, Ahab binds his fate with the fate of Moby Dick and recognizes his survival only in the death of Moby Dick. Ahab dooms himself to a self-devouring project in purusing Moby Dick for the intelligence and god-hood contained behind "the pasteboard mask" of a dumb brute. For like

Narcissus, Ahab sees the whale for only fulfillment of what he himself lacks. He sees a vulnerable creature limited in the universe, one lacking the consciousness of humanity but possessing, although not privy to, the omniscience of the gods. Ahab's quest involves augmenting his limited human capacity to the level he can strike down the mammoth power of nature which will bridge the gap, through slaying the beast, from human to god. In Ahab, Melville creates a haunting counterpoint to the popular, idealized American hunter-hero. He portrays the assumptions of the myth which recognize regeneration through the slaying the beast as a reward to be harvested from an act of violence, brutality entailing empowerment. And if the ritual and system are generated by a singular figure, the hunt can only be self-justifying.

Chapter 3: Faulkner

An Ancient and Unremitting Contest

Although William Faulkner looms large as a principal influence for McCarthy, *Blood Meridian*'s criticism lacks extensive and sustained scholarship engaging the two authors. Many critics use *Blood Meridian* as an opportunity to disengage McCarthy from Faulkner's influence that featured so noticeably in the earlier books. Such correspondence may seem obvious and neglectful of newer sources. But thirty-three years after *Blood Meridian*'s publication, after critical opinion has become radically diverse about the novel's lineages, a re-engagement with McCarthy's foremost sources can reveal insights overlooked as critics argued to establish him as an author in his own right. Understanding what elements and thematic preoccupations that McCarthy drew upon in Faulkner will provide grounding for the structure and vision of the borderlands in *Blood Meridian*. For both novels revise or

complicate the frontier tradition in a similar vein as *Moby-Dick*, particularly with their unstable boundaries, unconsummated exiled characters, and fixation on a biblical doom tied to the ritual of the hunt. Extending Rick Wallach's linkage of *Moby-Dick* and "The Bear," I propose a legacy of Melville, Faulkner, and McCarthy that embraces a divergent frontier tradition in American Literature.

For Rick Wallach, literary influence develops into lineage when a work develops an "intense inter-textual dialogue" with an earlier work through compositional correspondences, similar thematic preoccupations, and clear instances of divergence. In his article "MobyBear," Wallach recognized Faulkner actively engaging *Moby-Dick* in the creation of "The Bear." Assimilating *Moby-Dick*'s form and themes, Faulkner develops his narrative by both imitating and rejecting Melville in challenging the hunting quest with divergent methods or toward different conclusions. Wallach relies on *Anxiety of Influence* with mixed results; while Harold Bloom provides an established critical framework in arguing for literary lineage, the theory carries unwieldy cargo with its psychological underpinning and invented terminology. Consequently, my approach will use Bloom in a limited capacity as relevant in this thesis' scope.

Although critics recognize Faulkner as a major, if not the principal source for McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* lacks its share of criticism engaging Faulkner and an obvious predecessor in "The Bear." Not without reason, critics have focused upon the sources McCarthy used which helped differentiate *Blood Meridian* from his earlier books, southern novels that Harold Bloom bemoaned "too heavily freighted with Faulknerian cargo."[62] But

[62] Michael Lynn Crews, *Books Are Made Out of Books* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2017): 118.

three decades after McCarthy established himself as a separate voice, *Blood Meridian* should undergo an extensive dialogue with Faulkner's works. Recognizing what aspects of Faulkner that McCarthy carried westward can provide insight into the novel as significantly as what he left behind.

In the opening pages of "The Bear," the longest and most critical section in *Go Down, Moses*, Isaac McCaslin recalls his childhood hunting trips with a grandeur and nobility characteristic of the hunter-hero tradition. As a yearly excursion into the woods, the hunt takes on mythic proportions in Ike's mind, ordered by ritual and requiring a lengthy initiation. Ike asserts that the elements of the hunt—men, deer, dogs, the bear— are "ordered and compelled by and within the wilderness in the ancient and unremitting contest according to the ancient and immitigable rules."[63] Here, Ike reveals the hunt has translated into myth, the narrative generating order and significance to the tracking and killing of animals. Rather than a means to acquire food or materials, Ike sees the hunt as 'a contest' between man and animal that offers a validation of human strength and mastery. Still productive, the hunt provides the means to empower the self: "the best game of all, the best of all breathing and forever the best of all listening."[64] In this myth narrative, Ike fully invests himself in the hunt.

Indeed, Ike self-consciously imagines himself as a future hunter-hero before his first hunt at the age of ten. So potent does the myth become for Ike that he orders his own selfhood within the hunting tradition, his manhood as becoming a hunter, his home in the wilderness, and the bear as inheritance. R.W.B. Lewis recognizes "an archetypal or ideal human personality" as what determines Ike's judgements and trajectory in the story, "a

[63] William Faulkner, "The Bear" in Go Down, Moses (New York: Vintage International, 1942): 182.
[64] Ibid.

cluster of virtues unambiguously present from the beginning, as qualities to be striven for, prizes to be earned."[65] With a developed mythos, hunting moves beyond the act into a system and society that Wallach describes as a "powerful semiotic system that charges disparate activities with meaning, organizes them according to logical, if arbitrary, relations, and even binds individuals toward a common purpose."[66] For Ike in the first part of "The Bear" conflates manhood with hunting, his adulthood tied to the slaying of beasts: "It was of the men, not white nor black nor red but men, hunters, with the will and hardihood to endure and the humility and skill to survive."[67] These values, taught by his patriarchs and by Sam Fathers, stand as the requirements and rewards of the hunt as well as his own maturation. Consequently, Ike counts down the years before he is allowed to participate in the hunt, serve his "apprenticeship in the woods," and thereby become a man among those in the hunting party. So, at the age of ten, when his relatives allow him to join the hunt, Ike feels "he was witnessing his own birth."[68] As Olga W. Vickery asserts: "What is an annual vacation for Major De Spain and his friends becomes Issac's life."[69]

Faulkner relates the hunter-hero myth in the "The Bear" with little variation from the American archetype as it had developed up to that point. The characteristic elements found in *The Leatherstocking Tales* and the Daniel Boone narratives carry forward in the novella from the entry into a new world, through the initiation, and in the slaying of the animal avatar. The

[65] R. W. B. Lewis, "The Hero in the New World: William Faulkner's The Bear," in *Bear, Man, and God: Eight Approaches to William Faulkner's ""The Bear","* ed. Francis Lee Utley (New York: Random House, 1964), 190.
[66] Rick Wallach, "Moby Bear: Thematic and Structural Concordances between William Faulkner's 'The Bear' and Herman Melville's 'Moby Dick,' *The Southern Literary Journal*, vol. 30, no. 1 (1997): 45.
[67] William Faulkner, "The Bear" in *Go Down, Moses* (New York: Vintage International, 1942): 181.
[68] Ibid, 184.
[69] Olga W. Vickery, *The Novels of William Faulkner: A Critical Interpretation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995): 132.

changes Faulkner makes consist largely in emphasizing certain aspects of the myth like the kinship between hunter and prey and the adaptation to the wilderness.

Ike identifies the bear Old Ben as the foremost being in the wilderness, a space that once was inhabited by Indigenous people: "that doomed wilderness…where the old bear had earned a name, and through which ran not even a mortal beast but an anachronism indomitable and invincible out of an old dead time, a phantom, epitome and apotheosis of the old wild life."[70] In Old Ben, Ike sees the avatar of the wilderness, nature itself embodied in raw and powerful physicality. Dealing with Melville, Richard Slotkin identifies the sperm whale as the avatar of the wilderness through a passage similar to how Faulkner portrays Old Ben: "Almost universally, a lone whale— as a solitary whale is called— proves an ancient one. Like venerable moss-bearded Daniel Boone, he will have no one near him but Nature herself; and her he takes to wife in the wilderness of waters."[71] Solitary, wifeless, ancient Old Ben and Moby Dick reign as hermit kings over wild terrain. Melville later refers to Moby Dick living "like the last of the grizzly bears lived in settled Missouri."[72] Like the King of Troy, Old Ben presides over a land yet to be conquered; the bear having earned a name, Ike joins the hunt "to earn for himself from the wilderness the name and state of the hunter" through an engagement with this supreme beast.[73]

And in keeping with the hunter-hero narrative, Ike leaves behind "civilized society" to enter an unknown and primordial wilderness. Ike takes leave from his school and the

[70] William Faulkner, "The Bear" in *Go Down, Moses* (New York: Vintage International, 1942): 183.
[71] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; Or, The Whale*, ed. Herschel Parker and Harrison Hayford, (New York: Norton & Company, 2002): 307.
[72] Rick Wallach, "Moby Bear: Thematic and Structural Concordances between William Faulkner's 'The Bear' and Herman Melville's 'Moby Dick,' *The Southern Literary Journal*, vol. 30, no. 1 (1997): 51.
[73] William Faulkner, "The Bear" in *Go Down, Moses* (New York: Vintage International, 1942): 182.

plantation community to come to the hunting camp. His teacher in this new world, Sam Fathers, lives alone outside the camp, separated from the rest of the hunting party. Solitary and wifeless like Old Ben, Sam Fathers guides and instructs Ike in the trackless woods where at first, Ike feels like "a solitary boat…in the infinite waste of the ocean" so dwarfed by the unfamiliar landscape.[74] As a "son of a negro slave and a Chickasaw chief," Fathers acts an guide for Ike to learn the wilderness, to read and navigate it, so that the boy may conqueror it. Cleanth Brooks identifies Sam Fathers as a priest, for Faulkner repeatedly reminds us the hunt is foremost a ceremony, a rite of passage, calling Ike a novitiate as those entering a religious order.[75] And as clergy must learn to observe traditions and master scripture, Ike begins to recognize his place in the woods and the paths of animals moving through it. To do so, Ike must first relinquish his gun, compass, and watch, the instruments of civilization, and approaches the woods naked and 'taintless.' His methods then resemble those of Old Ben, tracking his prey through the sights and sounds and smells they impress upon the landscape.

Sam Fathers leads Ike through a series of rituals that teach Ike an alternative mode of being that allows the hunter to grow closer to the wilderness through developing sensory capacities. Utley asserts that the rituals follow the structure in which "man follows the ways of the gods in order to control them."[76] Sam teaches Ike to read the animal tracks, discriminate amongst the dogs, see and hear and smell Old Ben in order to become a hunter.

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[74] William Faulkner, "The Bear" in *Go Down, Moses* (New York: Vintage International, 1942): 185.
[75] Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner The Yoknapatawpha Country* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1991): 258
[76] Francis Lee Utley, "Pride and Humility: The Cultural Roots of Ike McCaslin," in *Bear, Man, and God: Eight Approaches to William Faulkner's ""The Bear","* ed. Francis Lee Utley (New York: Random House, 1964), 169.

As Ike develops as a woodsman, so develops his connection to Old Ben. He boasts in time that "he knew the old bear's footprint better than he did his own, and not only the crooked one…. the wilderness the old bear ran was his college and the old male bear itself, so long unwifed and childless as to become its own ungendered progenitor, was his alma matter.[77] There is an affection in Ike's admiration of Old Ben, a gratitude for its part in his education and self-discovery. In each encounter with Old Ben, Ike grows closer to the bear on account of his new skills and each encounter involves more intimately and danger than the last. The third time, the second sighting of Old Ben, Ike stands close enough to smell the bear "strong and hot and rank."[78] And Ike relates that the bear towering, looming over him felt "quite familiar, until he remembered: this was the way he had used to dream about it."[79] Fantasy and reality meet in Ike's purist of the bear, which lacks hatred but has instead a motivation originating in reverence and respect. Faulkner here diverges from Melville to hew closer to the hunter-hero idea to loving the animal you intend to kill. Ahab demonstrates a powerful obsession with Moby Dick, yet any love gets entangled in his sublime hatred. Ike McCaslin does not elaborate on any ill will toward Old Ben beyond his desire to hunt him, ascribing malevolence only to the dogs they use to hunt the bear and share beds with.

In "The Bear," the wilderness looms upon the mind of Ike with great weight, with the forces of the sublime and the possibility of transcendence offered by this new world. Ike emphasizes the sheer scale of what grows beyond the frontier— "the big woods, bigger and older than any recorded document" where puny man gnaws at "its immemorial flank."[80] Ike describes that when he first enters it, "the wilderness closed behind his entrance as it had

[77] William Faulkner, "The Bear" in *Go Down, Moses* (New York: Vintage International, 1942): 199.
[78] Ibid, 200.
[79] Ibid, 200.
[80] Ibid, 183-184.

opened momentarily to accept him" as if he had been swallowed whole, the wagon moving "not by its own volition but by attrition of their intact yet fluid circumambience, drowsy, earless, almost lightless."[81] Trackless, unfixed, powerful— the big woods resemble the sea in *Moby-Dick*, a landscape that resists human encroachment and erases the footholds of progress. Heroism in these places requires familiarity and mastery that comes as a result of endurance, through the humbling education of Ike or the monomaniacal cartography of Ahab,[82] which then allows the hunter to overtake the beast.

The act of killing symbolizes total mastery in that man not only can navigate the unfamiliar world, but also track down and overpower the foremost creature native to it. Blood-letting becomes the ceremony of communion, the ritual reconciling of the two sides of the frontier in the hunter, the hero with united powers over society and wilderness. Motivated by the alternative world populated by "taintless and incorruptible" figures like Sam Fathers, Lion, and Old Ben, Ike engages the frontier in an attempt to purify himself from his societies' corruptions. Consequently, Faulkner aligns Ike with the national myth of the new world by which American society emerged from the European degeneration through reckoning with a primordial, untouched wilderness. Lewis asserts that Faulkner taps into the "uniquely American idea" that the frontier offers an "ethically undefined" landscaped in which "a genuine and radical moral freedom could once again be exercised."[83] It is this idea that

[81] Ibid, 185.
[82] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; Or, The Whale*, ed. Herschel Parker and Harrison Hayford, (New York: Norton & Company, 2002): 166-167.
[83] R. W. B. Lewis, "The Hero in the New World: William Faulkner's The Bear," in *Bear, Man, and God: Eight Approaches to William Faulkner's ""The Bear","* ed. Francis Lee Utley (New York: Random House, 1964), 197.

centers the second half of "The Bear" after the hunters slay Old Ben, and where Faulkner subverts the hunter-hero tradition.

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In "The Bear," Faulkner hews closer to the hunter-hero archetype in portraying Ike's reverence and humility before Old Ben as well as aligning his work with the national mythology through an initiation that seeks to purify society through the hunter education. As taught by Sam Fathers, Ike must disarm himself and leave his gun behind "by his own will and relinquishment" in order to transcend "the bear's heretofore inviolable anonymity."[84] It's no coincidence that the hunt occurs during the school year and causes Ike to miss a week of class. For the wilderness provides an alternative education, and Ike asserts his intention to stay after Old Ben is slain and thereafter in his relinquishment of his inheritance. While Ahab stays confined in his cabin until the ship is properly seaward, indicating a link between his vitality and the ocean, Melville's hero cannot immerse himself beyond the frontier as Ike can. Even if love for oceanic wilderness motivated him, Ahab could never completely divest himself of the world he left. Ahab in a sense remains on the frontier line, unable to cross it, for he cannot even pretend to live like Moby Dick does. The *Pequod* separates Ahab from the wilderness, sustaining food, shelter, and a high degree of normal western lifestyle while on the ocean. In "The Bear," Ike crosses into the wilderness and a realm unfamiliar to human life. Whereas Ahab hunts Moby Dick from a ship of state and insulated society, Ike enters the

[84] William Faulkner, "The Bear" in *Go Down, Moses* (New York: Vintage International, 1942): 196.

woods as a novitiate and candidate with a greater possibility for immersion and assimilation and even of conversion to new mode of being.

Faulkner interrogates the frontier-hero myth at a later stage than Melville, having Ike accept the idealized aspects of the myth. Ike demonstrates a love for the wilderness, a divesture of civilized life, and a devotion to Sam Fathers' guidance and philosophy. Melville abrogates these ideal assumptions of the hunter-hero and his intentions in the character of Ahab, thereby creating the antithesis, the unholy mirror image of the ideal hunter. Motivated by hate, Ahab is all egotism as ritual master and father-figure, mobilizing all manner of tools and people in pursuit for only valuable for himself. When asked by Starbuck about the poor profitability of hunting Moby Dick, Ahab says, "my vengeance will fetch a great premium *here*!" and strikes his chest.[85] As such Melville focuses his interrogation on the hunt itself, subverting the hunter-hero image with its demonic, sinister opposite. Thereby, Melville introduces a mythic dualism for the hunter mythology between the popular, idealized image and the unsettling, corrupt Ahab. Rather than transcend the economic value of the hunt, Major De Spain's party enters the wilderness in search of leisure from an upper-class position in Southern society. Faulkner inverts Melville by placing his emphasis beyond the culmination of the hunt, drastically expanding the space of the hunting narrative to include the ramifications thereafter back in society. Faulkner reconceives the hunter-hero myth by focusing instead on the regeneration and reawaking that follows slaying the mythic animal, interrogating the supposed mastery the hunter-hero would then posses.

[85] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; Or, The Whale*, ed. Herschel Parker and Harrison Hayford, (New York: Norton & Company, 2002): 139.

In Faulkner's hunting tale, the avatar dies, but Ike does not kill it. Old Ben meets his end at the hands of Boon and the jaws of Lion, the three locked in a mortal struggle until the three "fell all of a piece, as a tree falls, so that all three of them, man dog and bear, seemed to bounce once."[81] Wedded together, the three fall, but Boon alone survives the collapse which also takes Sam Fathers down with it. If *Moby-Dick* ends in a collapse, "The Bear" really begins at one. Old Ben's death radiates forwards and backwards, into the future and into the past. Unlike Ahab, Ike does not know what the slaying of Old Ben will entail and pursues the hunt without identifiable rewards in mind.

Ike binds himself to the aims of Major De Spain's party and the teachings of Sam Fathers—their mythic hunt. And his education of the wilderness overshadows the act of killing which equates to an "accolade" or a "concrete trophy" that measures his progression as a hunter. Ike states his goal when recalling his first time at the camp: "to earn for himself from the wilderness the name and state of hunter provided he in his turn were humble and enduring enough."[86] Rather than restore his wounded identity or harvest new capabilities, Ike hunts Old Ben as a means of marking his progression and proving his identity as a hunter. Old Ben stands as a high-water mark of Ike's capacity and identity as a hunter, demonstrating a level of mastery rather than conferring it. Ike reveals such different focus in the opening of the second section: "He had killed his first buck … and in the next November he killed a bear. But before that accolade he had become as competent in the woods as many grown men with the same experience…. There was no territory within twenty-five miles of the camp that he did not know….He knew game trails that even Sam Fathers had never seen."[87] The

[86] William Faulkner, "The Bear" in *Go Down, Moses* (New York: Vintage International, 1942): 182.
[87] Ibid, 198-199.

importance for Ike falls upon his own development, which progresses as the result of his greater humility toward and immersion in the wilderness. Ahab seeks revenge over Moby Dick through the whale's destruction, whereas Ike pursues Old Ben for self-definition.

With such intentions, Old Ben's death stands more as symbolic fulfillment, or as a graduation ceremony than a battlefield victory. Laying siege to Moby Dick, Ahab in killing the white whale would conqueror it and nullify its existence in the world. The life of Old Ben nourishes Ike, rather than degrades him as Ahab believes Moby Dick does. Old Ben provides and sustains Ike's education in the wilderness, his "furious immortality" necessitating Major De Spain's hunt to extend over several years. So when the hunting dog Lion develops to a skill level which allows the hunters to draw blood from Old Ben, Ike laments that "he should have hated and feared Lion…. It seemed to him that there was a fatality in it….It was the beginning of the end of something."[88] Killing Old Ben would fulfill but also collapse the society in the wilderness that Ike is a part of. Wallach asserts "the racially and socially mixed crew of Major de Spain and General Compson's annual wilderness expedition is held together, both physically and in terms of purpose, by the hunt."[89] As is the *Pequod*'s crew through Ahab. Apecifically for the hunt for Old Ben, the hunting party persists, for without the legendary animal the hunt lacks a greater significance beyond that of a leisure sport. Old Ben's strength and immortality necessitates Sam Fathers participation in the group to provide farmers and bankers with the necessary skills to kill it. And Old Ben's mythic quality is what allows Ike to believe the hunt transcends a week vacation as well as gives Sam Fathers' teachings a high enough value for him to want to convert.

[88] William Faulkner, "The Bear" in *Go Down, Moses* (New York: Vintage International, 1942): 214.
[89] Rick Wallach, "Moby Bear: Thematic and Structural Concordances between William Faulkner's 'The Bear' and Herman Melville's 'Moby Dick,' *The Southern Literary Journal*, vol. 30, no. 1 (1997): 54.

So, the logic of the myth dictates that Sam Fathers must die alongside Old Ben. Because the mythic power called for his inclusion in the hunting party, when it dies Sam loses his value and significance from the view-point of the white, male society. The knowledge that allowed him to transgress the racial and social frontiers of southern plantation society is rendered irrelevant with Old Ben's death. Similarly, Queequeq, Tashtego, and Daggo rise to importance for their abilities in the confines of the hunt; in this context, more valuable than Ishmael as demonstrated by their lay. But if Moby Dick was slain, the wilderness conquered, the social relations would then revert back to racist norms. Before Ahab's ship sails, Ishmael, not yet a whaleman, is taken aback by "an individual as Queequeq circulating among the polite society of a civilized town;"[90] but an experienced whaleman would feel no surprise upon seeing "actual cannibals stand chatting on street corners" in a whaling town, sustained by the hunt. To digress, Melville wrote *Moby-Dick* at a time when whaling was nearly dead as industry, whale oil replaced by cheaper and more easily produced kerosene capable of supporting an industrializing nation. This industrialization process had neared its end by the time of Faulkner's writing "The Bear."

Lion dies as well and is buried alongside Sam, both outmoded tools of the hunt. Boon survives as well as the rest of the white hunters including Ike. Boon and Ike carry the inheritance of their white forefathers, so they are capable of returning to 'civilized' society. Both do not choose to, but live on only as powerless exiles. Boon, who slept beside Lion, and Ike, who learned from Sam, remain tied to the land they helped destroy by killing its avatar and protector Old Ben.

[90] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; Or, The Whale*, ed. Herschel Parker and Harrison Hayford, (New York: Norton & Company, 2002): 41.

Faulkner subverts the hunting myth by denying Ike the rewards expected for the hunter-hero after killing the avatar of the wilderness. Rather than becoming empowered, Ike exiles himself from society and binds himself to a doomed wilderness. He stands not as a hero, as Lewis Simpson argues, but as "a witness" to the destruction wrought by industrialization.[91] Writing after the closure of the frontier, Faulkner flips the ultimate power dynamic of *Moby-Dick* in seeing human agency overcoming the force of nature.

"The Bear" shows Ike receiving a system of meaning of the hunt from Sam Fathers and extending such knowledge into his ancestral society. His experience from hunting Old Ben pushes him to reconceive on a biblical scale the relationship between man and the earth he inhabits. Seeing his ancestors and inheritance as morally corrupt, Ike divests himself from southern society and seeks a purer existence similar to that of Sam Fathers. Yet the world Ike seeks has already been lost, defeated by the process by which Ike converted to it. Doomed the big woods are and the hunter and Ike too. This is the self-defeating heroism of Melville and of McCarthy, death and destruction that defy explanation, although Ike and Ishmael attempt to. Rick Wallach recognizes the fatalism of the heroism of the hunter-hero in the novella: "That the two great heroic acts of the novel, Boon's naked assault on the bear and Ike's renunciation of his patrimony, should both threaten to dwindle with time and the world of Southern arrogance into such exhausted and impotent denouements."[92] The significance of the hunt Ike holds ultimately crumbles, for killing the bear destroys the wilderness he converted to while hunting Old Ben. Ike in trying to replace Old Ben as protector of the wilderness by reaffirming God's covenant with man "to hold suzerainty over the earth and

[91] Lewis Simpson, "Ike McCaslin and the Second Fall of Man," in *Bear, Man, and God: Eight Approaches to William Faulkner's ""The Bear","* ed. Francis Lee Utley (New York: Random House, 1964), 206.
[92] Rick Wallach, "Moby Bear: Thematic and Structural Concordances between William Faulkner's 'The Bear' and Herman Melville's 'Moby Dick,' *The Southern Literary Journal*, vol. 30, no. 1 (1997): 54.

the animals in His name" which meant holding "the earth mutual and intact in the communal anonymity of brotherhood."[93] Yet by relinquishing his inheritance to his cousin and thereby evading responsibility as Stewart asserts, Ike only extricates himself from guilt without impact to the dying wilderness or the society he declares illegitimate.[94] Ike's idea of the hunt is therefore meaningless because the purposes he assigns to it are all overturned in the end. Rather than receiving generative powers, Ike is left doomed just as the Kid and Ahab are, the myth of the hunt a dead end, signifying nothing.

Chapter 4: Blood Meridian

Blood Meridian tells the story of the Kid and his initiation into Glanton's Gang which involves him in a hunt for human scalps in the borderlands between the United States and Mexico. As in the hunter-hero narrative, the Kid leaves behind his home and established society for the frontier. The Kid enlists with a group of filibusters under the command of Captain White, but a Comanche war party overtakes and massacres them. From the doomed venture, the Kid, like Ishmael, is the only survivor and wanders through Mexico until he is arrested. Glanton sets the Kid free from captivity and signs him onto a scalp hunting venture. His gang, a multi-racial and diverse hunting party, travels through a vast wilderness and across numerous frontiers hunting Comanches as well as Mexicans for their scalps. The Judge, the towering figure of evil, prompts and justified horrific acts on violence progressing their hunt beyond the structure of their hunting contract. When the gang settles at a ferry

[93] William Faulkner, "The Bear" in *Go Down, Moses* (New York: Vintage International, 1942): 243-244.
[94] David H. Stewart, "Ike McCaslin, Cop-Out," in *Bear, Man, and God: Eight Approaches to William Faulkner's ""The Bear","* ed. Francis Lee Utley (New York: Random House, 1964), 214.

conducting robberies, the Judge turns upon his comrades and hunts them to the last man, the Kid, who he consumes in the final moments of the novel.

In relation to the hunter-hero framework, *Blood Meridian* presents a hunting narrative without a clear or stable system of meaning. Yet, McCarthy retains the tropes and structure of the hunter-hero narrative as well as aspects that Melville and Faulkner added in developing their own hunting stories. As with *Moby-Dick*, recognizing the hunter-hero basis in *Blood Meridian* involves some initial difficulty, although such task becomes easier as a result of our investigation into the tradition. Sara Spurgeon recognized the investment of the hunter-hero tradition in McCarthy's novel in "The Sacred Hunter and the Eucharist of the Wilderness: Mythic Reconstructions in *Blood Meridian*," using Richard Slotkin' as a basis to recognize such tradition in *Blood Meridian*. Spurgeon recognizes Glanton's Gang as "playing the part of the sacred hunter, dark versions of classic Western heroes from Deerslayer and Daniel Boone."[95] Melville had already inverted the sacred hunter with Ahab, and the Judge's similarities with the captain, routinely noted by critics, reveal McCarthy working out of *Moby-Dick*. Like Ike and Ishmael, the Kid goes through an initiation that involves learning new skills for a new trade, living under a master of ritual, and assimilating to a new environment and society. The difference for the Kid is that he does not become privy to the meaning behind the gang's direction and killing. "Did you post witness?" the Judge asks the Kid at their final meeting. "To report to you on the continuing existence of those places once you'd quit them?"[96] The Kid calls such notion crazy, having not revisited the earlier events of

[95] Sara Spurgeon, "The Sacred Hunter and the Eucharist of the Wilderness: Mythic Reconstructions in Blood Meridian," in *Cormac McCarthy: New Directions*, ed. James Lily (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2014): 83.
[96] Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West*, (New York: Vintage International, 1989): 344.

the novel after experiencing them. Ishmael and Ike revisit their history as participants in the hunt and thereby later assign significances to their earlier experiences. In contrast, the Kid has no such opportunity.

Scholarship on the novel has variously recognized the cultural and historical significance as revisionist in exposing capitalist, imperialistic, systematic racist, etc. structures underlying American Expansionism. Such works add crucial knowledge and readings to our understanding of the novel. By isolating *Blood Meridian* with the literary hunting tradition, this thesis focuses on a technical narrative approach that provides for new understandings that can further inform and provide opportunities for new political readings of the novel. With *Blood Meridian*, this thesis will examine the novel's connections with *Moby-Dick*, "The Bear," and the hunter-hero tradition through a rough structure examining the Kid, the Judge, the trope of symbolic reconciliation, and the structure of the hunter-hero myth. Understanding these connections gives us insight into how *Blood Meridian* came to fruition and where McCarthy found a basis for his scalp hunting tale. Through such an approach, McCarthy's divergences from his predecessors becomes more visible and thereby offers new and compelling meanings for his enigmatic magnum opus.

Bears that Dance, Bears that Don't

On the first page of *Blood Meridian*, Cormac McCarthy introduces the Kid and sees him forsaking his childhood home to travel toward the frontier. As McCarthy seems to resist larger political narratives, he sees the Kid pass through several orders of violence, systems that justify killing with little to no awareness of them. The Kid enlists in the business of scalp

hunting but continues to participate even after the Gang abrogated their contract and became a profitless enterprise. The ideology of Manifest Destiny trumpeted by Captain White is subordinated to the Kid's need for clothes as his motivation for enlisting with the filibusters. The Kid's narrative in the hunt is not clearly visible and stands likewise undefined throughout the novel. From his introduction to his demise, the Kid gives little indication of his motivations or opinions on the events he participates in. The reader must then come to their own interpretations about the Kid, the narrative linking his journey together. With the central focus on the Kid, the reader like Ike must align tracks, expressions of an absent and undefined creature, to understand the nature and significance of the central figure.

For without a guide like Ishmael or Ike, *Blood Meridian* develops vaguely, drifting and circling back as it tracks the Kid's life. As if the narrator adopted the undefined movement of the scalp hunters (or the Pequod), the journeys and acts of violence in the novel are often connected merely by "they rode on." Bernard Schopen confronts this feature of *Blood Meridian*:

> I mean, first of all, that the novel presents, through its every word, phrase, and sentence, its every pattern and structure, a vision of human existence reduced to a confrontation with a fundamental mystery for which religion has traditionally provided answers: human evil. This, ultimately, is the subject of the narrator's obsessive and unsuccessful inquiry. Beyond that, this inquiry take place in a physical and thematic landscape charged with religious nuance, allusion, and language.[97]

[97] Bernard A. Schopen, ""They Rode On": *Blood Meridian* and the Art of Narrative," *Western American Literature* 30, no. 2 (1995): 191. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43024695.

Schopen recognizes that a mystery pervades the narrative structure of *Blood Meridian* and argues that the richness of its literary texture reveals a careful structure behind it. While this thesis does not possess the space to evaluate Schopen's conclusions that religion dictates the structure of the novel, the framing of McCarthy's work as an inquiry is relevant. The Judge does not narrate the text. Instead, an unnamed narrator does through following the coming-to-age, bildungsroman of the Kid. But unlike Melville or Faulkner, the Kid's initiation and consummation of self never completes or really even begins. Lacking such voice, the Kid's participation in repeated and horrific acts of violence presents a central mystery critics and readers have sought to answer.

In the first two paragraphs of the novel, McCarthy makes two references to "The Bear" that may provide insight into the Kid or at least his purpose in the novel as well as into *Blood Meridian*'s engagement with the hunter-hero tradition. The first reference to Faulkner's novella involves McCarthy coopting the language Faulkner uses in section four of "The Bear." McCarthy writes that the Kid's "folk are known for **hewers of wood** and **drawers of water** but in truth his father has been a **schoolmaster**."[98] This sentence corresponds to Ike's argument for why he renounces his inheritance that he gives his cousin, specifically to his idea that god caused the civil war to punish the South for breaking their holy covenant by believing they owned the land they lived upon. After his cousin interrupts him, Ike restates the importance of his need to state the reasons behind his renunciation and then continues his list of Americans compelled to fight in the Civil War: "**the drawers of bills** and **the shavers of notes** and **the schoolmasters** and the self-ordained to teach and lead

[98] Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West*, (New York: Vintage International, 1989): 3.

all that horde of semi-literate with a white shirt but no change for it…Who else could have made them fight: could struck them so aghast with fear and dread to turn shoulder to shoulder."[99] Here, McCarthy borrows Faulkner's construction with "hewers of wood" and "drawers of water" as well as the corresponding reference to schoolmasters. Matching with Faulkner three times may only have aesthetic correspondence until we consider what happens in the opening of McCarthy's novel.

Three paragraphs later, the Kid relinquishes his familial inheritance and leaves his childhood home never to return. Like Ike, the Kid passes over a corrupted inheritance—his schoolmaster father "lies in drink" and never taught his son to read or write. Whereas Ike rejects the plantation estate because he believes his forebears' ownership of it not only goes against God but also is only a delusion, the Kid never receives an education from his father a schoolmaster and lacks material sustenance. McCarthy describes the kid in what seems a malnourished and poorly provided for state: "He is pale and thin, he wears a thin and ragged linen shirt."[100] The kid runs away from home, orphaning himself from the society he grew up in, perhaps in search of greater sustenance, an education, and/or an outlet for the "mindless violence" brooding within him.[101]

But McCarthy gives no clear reason for the Kid's departure; no ledger book nor great hunt nor elaborate biblical-historical argument precedes the self-imposed exile. The Kid stands opposite from his predecessors, Ishmael and Ike, whose consciousnesses overwhelm and control their respective texts. The Kid's unexplained departure stands against Ishmael's

[99] William Faulkner, "The Bear" in *Go Down, Moses* (New York: Vintage International, 1942): 274.
[100] Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West*, (New York: Vintage International, 1989): 3.
[101] Ibid.

myriad desires in "Loomings" for taking to the sea as well as Ike's enthrallment with Old Ben and the hunting mythology that draws him to hunting camp. And in running away and a year living on his own, the Kid becomes "finally divested of all that he had been. His origins are become remote as is his destiny…"[102] From an already minimal characterization, McCarthy makes the Kid even further unintelligible and non-specific, aiming at a sort of universality for the unnamed Kid to represent. McCarthy continues: "…and not again in all the world's turning will there be terrains so wild and barbarous to try whether the stuff of creation may be shaped to man's will or whether his own heart is not another kind of clay."[103] Sara Spurgeon cities this passage as the national symbolic project of America that McCarthy sets out to rewrite, subvert, and criticize.[104] So, the novel begins with a more or less universal main character, his meager context wiped away, aligned with the national mythological narrative that drives the hunter-hero tradition to create and define a national identity through engaging with the frontier. McCarthy seems to focus on the process by which the hunter enlists in the hunt more so than Faulkner who begins with Ike already invested in the hunt for Old Ben. Like Ishmael, the Kid stumbles upon the hunting party that centers the narrative. But unlike Melville, McCarthy does not focus upon one hunt but several, seeing the Kid join several warring groups throughout the novel. Several hunting narratives comprise *Blood Meridian,* which may show McCarthy's interest less centered upon the hunt than the process of enlisting in it.

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[102] Ibid, 4-5.
[103] Ibid, 5.
[104] Sara Spurgeon, "The Sacred Hunter and the Eucharist of the Wilderness: Mythic Reconstructions in Blood Meridian," in *Cormac McCarthy: New Directions,* ed. James Lily (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2014): 89.

The second correspondence between "The Bear" *and* McCarthy's novel comes on the first page of *Blood Meridian,* when his father speaks: "Night of your birth. Thirty-three. The Leonids they were called. God how did the stars did fall. I looked for blackness, holes in the heavens. The Dipper stove."[105] Here, McCarthy foretells of the violent wasteland to come, the doom that likewise haunts *Moby-Dick* and "The Bear." But in referencing the meteor shower, McCarthy aligns the Kid's birth with that of Turl in Faulkner's novella, the death of the Kid's mother with the suicide of Turl's mother Tomy:

Tomasim called Tomy Daughter of Thucydus @ Eunice Born 1810 dide in Child bed June 1883 and Burd. Yr stars fell

nor the next:

Turl Son of Thucydus @ Eunice Tomy born Jun 1883 yr stars fell Fathers will[106]

Learning of his grandfather Carothers McCaslin's rape of his own daughter, Ike turns against his family inheritance and southern plantation society. John Sepich has done a thorough cataloging of possible sources for McCarthy's reference to the astronomical event and showing its significance historically, scientifically, and literary.[107] This point of correspondence Sepich identifies, yet it receives no further comment than "Faulkner defined a year by referring to the shower" in which a boy was born, and his mother died. Considering Faulkner's influence on McCarthy and how pivotal these two lines from the ledger book are

[105] Ibid, 3.
[106] William Faulkner, "The Bear" in *Go Down, Moses* (New York: Vintage International, 1942): 255.
[107] John Sepich, *Notes on Blood Meridian* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2008): 51-52.

in “The Bear” as well as for the entirety of *Go Down, Moses*, this correspondence demands further attention.

In “The Bear,” the date 1883 refers to the horrific consequences of an unspeakable and unexplainable act of violence. Carothers McCaslin, Ike’s grandfather, raped one of his slaves Eunice and fathered a daughter Tomy from that transgression. Then, Carothers raped his own daughter Tomy and impregnated her. Eunice commits suicide by drowning herself after finding out that the man who raped her, also raped and impregnated their daughter Tomy in June of 1833. Also in June of that year, Tomy dies in delivering that child Turl, who is both Carothers’ son and grandson. From his tracking of Old Ben, Ike receives the perceptive and analytical abilities to recognize this crime buried in his family’s ledger books. And the revealing of his grandfather’s transgression initiates Ike’s renunciation of his inheritance, giving basis to a wider and more encompassing transgression between man and God. The hunt provides Ike with the power to create narrative, which the hunt itself is, and Ike turns such skill to recognize the violence and trauma in his family history. After reading the ledger book, Ike aligns a singular act of unspeakable and unexplainable violence with Southern society, Christianity, and the horrific history of the New World. This act of ‘mindless violence’ as it may be called centers Faulkner’s novella. And the fact that McCarthy references that crime in the year and meteor shower of his main character’s birth (which also involves the death of his mother in childbirth) demands scrutiny. In Faulkner’s work, 1833 occurs before the novel begins and thirty-four years before Ike is born. Through his participation in the hunt for Old Ben, Ike gains the ability to track and locate his grandfather’s crime in the historical records. But 1833 begins *Blood Meridian* as the year the

Kid was born in whom "broods already a taste for mindless violence."[108] "The Bear" justifies the hunt with the development of skills and values that locate as well as cause Ike to condemn his grandfather's crime, yet Ike's narrative culminates in the impotency of the hunter rather than any moral victory. McCarthy instead dispenses with initiation and education and holds up "mindless violence" as the motivator for hunt, an immoral or perhaps even amoral hunt. A hunt that neither begins nor ends with a notion of its significance.

The context of *Blood Meridian*'s first reference to "The Bear" becomes important as well, for the line McCarthy focuses upon involves Ike's attempt to explain what caused Americans to enlist in the Civil War. With a universal main character and a national symbolic myth as a basis, McCarthy may find significant interest in what drove Americans to try and shape the wilderness beyond the frontier to their will. Not in a single event like the Civil War, but countless times over from whaling to bear hunting to filibustering to scalp hunting. McCarthy forgoes an avatar of the wilderness, which Moby Dick and Old Ben represent, unlike Melville continues the narrative after instances of doom, and denies a singular voice to give order to the narrative of violence. McCarthy zeros in on Ike's reckoning with what motivated 'hewers' and 'drawers' and 'school-teachers' to lead the 'semi-literate' into battle. But McCarthy gives little credence to Ike's answer that God motivated men to violence when, later in the text, The Judge says to Tobin over the ruins of the Anasazi people: "If God meant to interfere in the degeneracy of mankind would he not have done so now? Wolves cull themselves, man. What other creature could? And is the race of man not more predacious yet?"[109] This is McCarthy's response to Ike's fumbling to give

[108] Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West*, (New York: Vintage International, 1989): 3.
[109] Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West*, (New York: Vintage International, 1989): 153.

reason to warfare, a human inclination towards violence that follows the animal world but is carried out against members of its own kind. In elevating hunting to war, replacing the whale or bear with other human beings, McCarthy reconciles the hunter-hero mythology with the genocidal and horrific violence of American Expansionism. Whereas Faulkner showed how the ideals of such mythology stood in contrast to development of America, McCarthy aligns the historical basis and expression of such myths with those horrors like scalp hunting. What Melville gestured at in "Fast Fish and Loose Fish," McCarthy gives broader expression in *Blood Meridian*, characterizing American Expansionism as a war, hunt, and competitive game—notions that historically obfuscated the violence attending the frontier—in a narrative replete with unescapable brutality and wholesale murder.

In the film version of *The Shinning*, Stanley Kubrick changed the color of the Beetle that the principal character drives from red to yellow. The red Beetle of Stephen King's novel remains in the movie, crushed beneath an overturned 18-wheeler as a declaration of independence and originality. Cormac McCarthy may play a similar trick in *Blood Meridian* when a bear attacks Glanton's Gang and carries off one of the Delawares. There's no mistaking the references to Faulkner's bear hunt; not only does McCarthy have his bear carry "some foul goblet" alluding to the central symbol of Ike's defiled inheritance but also likens the taken Delaware to "some crazed defector in a gesture of defiant camaraderie."[110] The latter image parodies the culmination of Ike McCaslin's trajectory in "The Bear," seeing his relinquishment of his inheritance in favor of kinship with the natural world as mock heroism.

[110] Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West*, (New York: Vintage International, 1989): 143.

McCarthy distills "The Bear" to single simile that lampoons Ike and portrays the symbolic kinship between hunter and prey as absurd. Furthermore, this caricature reveals how dependent "The Bear" is upon Ike and the hunter mythology in generating meaning. For Faulkner's novella transcends the hunter-hero tradition through Ike's association of Old Ben and the fall of the wilderness, his hunting education allowing him to recognize the corruption of southern society and of his inheritance. The significance of Ike's reverence and alliance with Old Ben comes out through his narration, particularly in the fourth chapter, and would not bear out if the story came from another perspective. Regardless of McCarthy's intent with this nod to Faulkner, such image provides us with a symbol that captures *Blood Meridian*'s relationship to the hunter-hero tradition. For McCarthy largely describes, rather than narrates, the events in his first western novel, as Dana Phillips argues.[111] No character like Ishmael or Ike controls the narrative and aligns images or events with their perspective to garner significance. Neither the consciousness of the Kid nor the Judge completely overtakes the novel as happens *Moby-Dick* or "The Bear."

Federated Along a Common Keel

Blood Meridian, in addition to its narrative structure, shares thematic similarities to the hunter-hero tradition such as the symbolic reconciliation of the hunter and the wilderness. Glanton's Gang embodies western 'civilization' and 'savagery' simultaneously, at once wielding new Colt patent revolvers bought from a Prussian Jew and a rifle inscribed with Latin quotes while also wearing necklaces of human ears and saddle bags made from human skin. McCarthy first describes Glanton's Gang by likening their image to cannibals: "the

[111] Dana Phillips, "History and the Ugly Facts," *Cormac McCarthy: New Directions*, ed. James Lilley (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002).

whole like a visitation from some heathen land where they and others like them feed on human flesh."[112] Such likeness corresponds to Melville's description of the *Pequod*: "She was a thing of trophies. A cannibal of a craft, tricking herself forth in the chased bones of her enemies."[113] While representing the latest technologies, Melville's whaling ship also resembles the thing which it hunts. The common creaturehood that exists between the whalebone-legged Ahab and Moby Dick finds basis in the sacred marriage and cannibal Eucharist common to the hunter-hero tradition. Likewise, McCarthy recognizes a symbolic reconciliation between white hunters and the 'Indian' wilderness that Slotkin articulated as a central feature of the hunter-hero mythology.[114]

The subject that McCarthy chose for the novel, scalp hunters, implicates the hunter-hero myth with the horrific violence committed by America upon native populations, people who were hunted down like animals. Thereby, McCarthy can more directly engage war with the hunting mythology and recognize a correspondence that Melville and Faulkner dealt with indirectly. Scalp hunting itself sits at the nexus between indigenous and colonial cultures; while scalping had roots before the discovery of the Americas by Europeans, the practice became more widespread thereafter as colonial powers began offering bounties for indigenous scalps as early as the 17th century and only increased as conflict between the two became more widespread.[115] As a bounty system, scalp hunting as practiced by colonial powers and Glanton's Gang shared little of the spiritual or ritual significance the practice

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[112] Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West*, (New York: Vintage International, 1989): 8.
[113] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; Or, The Whale*, ed. Herschel Parker and Harrison Hayford, (New York: Norton & Company, 2002): 71.
[114] Richard Slotkin, Richard. *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier 1600-1860* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973): 539.
[115] Geoffrey Abbot, "Scalping," Encyclopedia Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/topic/scalping.

held for indigenous societies. Instead, Glanton's Gang scalp hunting corresponds to the others' practice on the basis of cruelty, of violence. Consequently, the narrative of the hunt falls away to focus attention upon the horror rather the significance or justification that motivated it. Glanton's Gang participates in the practice for profit at first, but later for only a personal pleasure that is unexplainable by larger political or cultural narratives.

In both *Moby-Dick* and *Blood Meridian*, the blood ritual of the hunt is motivated by not love but violence. Like whaling, scalp hunting offered significant economic incentive. As in *Moby-Dick*, the hunters in *Blood Meridian* abandon monetary pursuit in the course of their narratives. Glanton's Gang pursues scalps even after their provocation of their Mexican employer just as Ahab strays from whale hunting to hunt primarily Moby Dick. While at first motivated partly by profit, ultimately the *Pequod* and Glanton's Gang endeavor onwards in search of violence and the act of murder. Sara Spurgeon cites the first description of Glanton's Gang as representative of the novel's "disturbing trope of cannibalization and the perversion of the sacred eucharist…of inversion and violation."[116] Melville subverted the whaling industry with the satanic character of Ahab and sacrilegious rituals, contradicting not only the economic value of the hunt but also the sacred mythology developed in the tradition of the hunter-hero. McCarthy does the same with Glanton's Gang, which pursues violence beyond economic reward as well as engages with a leader with satanic characterizations and participates in repeated acts of unredeemed violence.

Cormac McCarthy in depicting a correspondence between brutality and intellectualism in the Judge recognizes that the hunt depends on both the hunter and the

[116] Sara Spurgeon, "The Sacred Hunter and the Eucharist of the Wilderness: Mythic Reconstructions in Blood Meridian," in *Cormac McCarthy: New Directions,* ed. James Lily (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2014): 86.

author of the rituals, the story-teller who creates order and significance. Melville draws attention in *Moby Dick* to its staging by Ishmael through frequent interruptions and theatrical techniques. And McCarthy finds basis for such in another of his principal influences, moreover. Faulkner introduces the hunters of "The Bear" as "voices quiet and weighty and deliberate for retrospection and recollection and exactitude among the concrete trophies—the racked guns and the heads and skins—in the libraries of town houses or the offices of plantation houses or (and best of all) in the camps themselves where the intact and still-warm meat yet hung."[117] Here, Faulkner likewise locates his hunting party at the intersection of 'savagery' and 'civilization.' While lacking the cannibal connotations of the other two other, Faulkner still recognizes a mutual investment of the wilderness and established society. Unlike *Moby-Dick* or *Blood Meridian*, "The Bear" features a hunting party composed primarily of upper-class men who enter the wilderness not for money but leisure. However, the Judge possess a level of education and sophistication that sets him apart from the rest of the scalp hunters. Conversing in different languages, paying a social call to the Sonoran Governor, and demonstrating a thorough knowledge of jurisprudence, the Judge seems to take part in scalp hunting for pleasure rather than profit as such skills would provide a vast opportunity for employment. And like Ike, the Judge attempts to narrate and align events into over-arching theories that explain the violence at hand as he specifically does when the Kid is imprisoned. Furthermore, the Judge eventually turns upon his compatriots and condemns those he once considered family, as Ike does, although more violently and perhaps less earnestly. But McCarthy casts doubt upon his ritual master and story-teller character, using

[117] William Faulkner, "The Bear" in *Go Down, Moses* (New York: Vintage International, 1942): 182.

an unnamed narrator to distance the novel from the perspective of the Judge who seeks to articulate significance.

Did You Post Witness?

Where McCarthy diverges from the hunter-hero tradition as well as from Melville and Faulkner is in the structure of the narrative, specifically in the character of his protagonist. The Kid, like Ahab but not Ike, dies at the end of the events in the novel. And furthermore, the Kid like Ahab dies in an embrace, the former in the clutches of the Judge while the latter in the subsuming waves of the sea. Swallowed, both Ahab and the Kid thus require another to narrate their tale. Consequently, the two cannot recall and shape the narrative as Ishmael and Ike do. Ishmael intersperses the hunt for Moby Dick with cetology, philosophy, and allusions, which add significance to Ahab's quest, whereas Ike can narrate his younger years through a perspective he only obtained after the culmination of the bear hunt and his renunciation. That is to say Ishmael and Ike relate their respective initiations after completing them and therefore can assign meaning to events that they experienced from perspectives of ignorance. Consequently, Ike can speak about a doomed wilderness and Old Ben as its last king (Priam); and Ishmael possesses the authority to raise whaling into historical, national, and philosophic significance on his first whaling voyage. McCarthy kills the Kid and denies him any prior education to overcome his ignorance at the start of the novel. The Kid "watches, pale and unwashed. He can neither read nor write and in him broods already a taste for mindless violence. All history present in that visage, the child the father of the man," a

phrase borrowed from William Woodsworth.[118] One can say that Melville and Faulkner do the opposite with Ike and Ishmael standing in for their younger selves. The Kid remains ignorant or lacks an opportunity to articulate his perspective in *Blood Meridian*. The closest he comes to doing so occurs when he meets an old woman in the desert and begins to tell her "that he was an American…and that he had traveled much and seen many things and had been at war," only to realize the woman was a "dried shell and she had been dead in that place for years."[119] After the Ferry massacre, it is the Judge who narrates the Kid's history to the authorities, linking the Kid's actions in a "murderous plan" previously conceived and fulfilled in the massacre.[120] Unlike with Ike or Ishmael, the reader of *Blood Meridian* cannot rightly know the kid's perspective and his significance for the events in the novel.

McCarthy diverges from Melville and Faulkner by denying the Kid narrative control, distancing his novel from an order of the hunt that grants it significance. In having other characters than the protagonist recognize significances for the hunt, McCarthy can draw readers away from believing specific justifications for violence toward a focus upon the violence itself. Denying the Kid a voice relocates attention upon an explanation for the horrific violence, a reason McCarthy that evades by making the Judge, the ritual master, a liar and obfuscator. Unlike Faulkner, McCarthy follows the Kid chronologically rather than jumping backward and forward in time. "The Bear" creates significance from its structure, which juxtaposes Old Ben's death and Ike's renunciation, emphasizing the connectivity between two events in the narrative of Ike's initiation, which told linearly occur five years

[118] Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West*, (New York: Vintage International, 1989): 3.
[119] Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West*, (New York: Vintage International, 1989): 328.
[120] Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West*, (New York: Vintage International, 1989): 318.

apart and would be separated by the fifth section. Like Ike, Ishmael interrupts the narrative with knowledge and experiences that occur after the events of the novel. Ishmael's later research into cetology supports Ahab's quest for Moby Dick in recognizing scientific and cultural significance for the sperm whale. If told by Ishmael the whaling neophyte, Ahab would stand alone in arguing for Moby Dick's importance and thereby could more easily be dismissed as a madman. The complexity of *Moby-Dick* stems in part from moments when the characterization of the white whale as a dumb brute is suspended and the hunt becomes a mythic battle between man and the avatar of the wilderness.

In *Blood Meridian*, the main character rarely speaks to his understanding of the events he participates in. Rather, the Judge takes upon himself the role that Ishmael and Ike preform in aligning events into a narrative, a narrator entirely different from the other works. The Judge articulates his project of becoming a suzerain in which everything exists only by his consent in chapter XIV; he argues War is a great game that forces destiny chapter XVII; and the Judge attempts to explain to the Kid, just before he ends the latter's life in the last chapter, the significance of the Kid's participation in the events of the novel.[121] Whereas Captain White's ideology bears only upon the short filibustering venture, the Judge's speeches carry applicability across the narrative. And while the Kid fails to understand the Judge, the Judge offers a way to read meaning into the events of the Kid's life. The narrative focuses on the Kid's life but is weighted toward his relationship with the Judge. *Blood Meridian* spends the most narrative space with Glanton's Gang, and the Kid's life is summarized before the first meeting the Judge and between the aftermath of the ferry

[121] Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West*, (New York: Vintage International, 1989): 207-208; 259-262; 337-349.

massacre and the final meeting with Judge. The Judge may then well provide the best voice for the Kid's life. However, the Judge stands separate from the narrator of the Kid's life, coming on stage and off repeatedly through the novel. As a result, the Judge's attempts to give significance to the Kid's life come into conflict with the more objective voice of the narrator. Thereby, that which justifies the hunt remains elusive.

McCarthy further revises the hunter-hero myth that he inherits by focusing on the Kid's participation in the hunt rather than on the hunt itself. For Faulkner, the hunt gained significance for Ike through the ritual of initiation with Ike learning the tools of perception that allow him to recognize the sexual and immoral transgression of his ancestors. Without a clear or cohesive program of initiation, the Kid cannot recognize nor articulate the significance of his participation in the hunt. Wallach writes that "in contrast to the judge, the kid's 'postnatal development' has been arrested, or, worse, reversed."[122] The task of understanding the Kid's life falls then to the reader which involves answering the question, as John Sepich asks, of whether or not to believe the Judge. For the Judge claims a significance for the Kid's life, one that the Kid does not or cannot give for himself. And through McCarthy's endowing the Judge with extraordinary powers in the novel, inhuman capabilities more similar to those of Moby Dick than of Ahab, the Judge possess an authority in the novel that a reader cannot ignore. Such authority would seem to make the Judge the Ishmael or Ike of *Blood Meridian*, ordering the events of the hunt toward some significance. Consequently, the narrative of the hunt is dictated by the most barbarous and theatrical character that often undermines his own credibility.

[122] Rick Wallach, "Judge Holden, *Blood Meridian*'s Evil Archon," in *Sacred Violence: Cormac McCarthy's Western Novels*, ed. Wade Hall and Rick Wallach (El Paso: *Texas Western Press*, 2003), 4.

McCarthy aligns the Kid with the hunter-hero tradition by introducing him as an exile and an orphan from society that enlists with a hunting party that seems to offer an opportunity for his coming to age. Yet McCarthy denies the Kid any initiation or education that allows him to recognize his role in such tradition. Spurgeon deals with the Kid by casting him as the Judge's opponent, the hunter-hero who carries a bible and seeks "to reestablish the relationship of the sacred hunter as guardian and protector of his community."[123] Yet to do so, the Kid hardly differs from Ike in such a doomed task. Again, this dynamic comes very late in the novel at the time the Kid wanders aimlessly until his death. Previously the Kid did not resemble the hunter-hero, so it is difficult to categorize him as such in the summary description of the fifteen years he wanders. Spurgeon asserts that the Kid in this time attempts to return to the previous order of the hunter-hero as typically portrayed in popular mythology. Yet McCarthy does not expose to us or the Kid an understanding of the sacred hunter previously that would indicate a later return or restoration of such creed. Unlike Ike, the Kid never underwent a process of initiation that educated him to such myth. Rather he remains ignorant during his initiation into Glanton's Gang, acting like Ishmael as a removed observer as he does in Captain White's army. While he does search for an alternative during those fifteen years, crossing paths with a penitent cult, the Kid does not demonstrate a coherent shift away from his perpetual ignorance throughout the novel and stands similarly inarticulate before the Judge just before his death.

[123] Sara Spurgeon, "The Sacred Hunter and the Eucharist of the Wilderness: Mythic Reconstructions in Blood Meridian," in *Cormac McCarthy: New Directions,* ed. James Lily (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2014): 96.

Still Having His Humanities

William Burroughs in *Naked Lunch* goes west like a many American novels, except he leaves behind the strain of optimism that animates the works of Twain and Kerouac: "(Through the bars of East St. Louis lies the dead frontier, riverboat days.) Illinois and Missouri, miasma of mound-building peoples, groveling worship of the food source, cruel and ugly festivals, dead-end horror… reaches from Moundville to the lunar deserts of coastal Peru."[124] The frontier in Burroughs' work lacks the reverence for the landscape as well as the excitement to traverse it that one finds even in Melville and Faulkner. The great mythos of Manifest Destiny ultimately yields "iridescent lakes and orange flares," transforms New Orleans into "a dead museum," and produces a "dead slot-machine country" in South Texas.[125] The landscapes of *Naked Lunch* share an aesthetic correspondence with the grotesque, sublime, and carnivalesque spaces McCarthy creates in *Blood Meridian*. But the relevance of referencing *Naked Lunch* to *Blood Meridian* lies in two lines of Burroughs: "America is not a young land: it is old and dirty and evil before the settlers, before the Indians. The evil is there waiting."[126] In the optical democracy of *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy describes evil across nations, cultures, and peoples, acts of violence ideologically motivated and those random and senseless. Of all the horrors, the Judge's acts of cruelty stand as the most unexplainable. And it is no accident that when Tobin recounts meeting the Judge for the first time, he says "And there he set. No horse. Just him and his legs crossed, smiling as we road up. Like he'd been expecting us."[127]

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[124] William Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* (New York: Grove Press, 2001): 11.
[125] Ibid, 13-14.
[126] Ibid, 11.
[127] Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West*, (New York: Vintage International, 1989): 131.

The Judge also provides a structure for violence in the novel. When questioned by Toadvine on his purposes, the Judge responds: "Only nature can enslave man and only when the existence of each last entirety is routed out and made to stand naked before him will he be properly suzerain of the earth."[128] In saying so, the Judge aligns with the archetypal battleground of man vs nature in the hunter-hero and larger national myth tradition, especially as it relates the biblical idea of a New Adam. Like Ahab, the Judge demands self-definition through a violent tracking down and capturing of the natural world. But in his emphasis on cataloging nature, the Judge recalls Ishmael's project to understand whaling from the sperm whale to the sharks down to ship's rigging. Encyclopedic, the Judge similarly may be said to be in his collection of flowers and birds. The mention of suzerainty has obvious references to Faulkner's "The Bear" as the term is central to the broken covenant Ike sees between man and God. The Judge makes the same misunderstanding as Ike sees his forefathers and the Chickasaw elders making in mistaking suzerainty for possessing the earth for oneself instead of "holding the earth mutual and intact in the communal anonymity of brotherhood."[129] And the Judge offers a justification for war on the basis that it is "the ultimate game because war is at last a forcing of the unity of existence. War is God."[130] The implication of such is that war thought of as a duel provides its own justification because the loser dies and the victory continues to exist. And in these games of life and death, moral as

[128] Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West*, (New York: Vintage International, 1989): 207.
[129] William Faulkner, "The Bear" in Go Down, Moses (New York: Vintage International, 1942): 244.
[130] Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West*, (New York: Vintage International, 1989): 26.

well as spiritual concerns are subsumed, the Judge says.[131] Rather than a justification of war, the Judge provides a definition of war that necessitates violence and is universally applicable.

While the Judge can be viewed as articulating a significance to the hunt in his speech about war as a duel, such philosophy appears only late in the novel, lacks stability and consistency, and lacks clarity. Rather the Judge's "testing of wills," I will argue, relates to the power and persistence of myths. Moreover, while a grand and powerful voice in a novel without many voices, the Judge should not be considered to speak for the novel as a whole. While some critics read the novel's meaning in the Judge's perspective, I believe such approach limits and simplifies the complexity of the novel. For the Judge merely offers another myth, that man will conquer nature or be enslaved by it, just as Ahab and Sam Fathers do but in a more limited capacity. For unlike the educated and introspective Ishmael and Ike, the Kid lacks the capacity to understand or internalize the ideas of his father-figure. Rather, the Kid should be counted among the "Goldseekers. Itinerant degenerates bleeding westward like some heliotrophic plague."[132] For such quote aligns with Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier theses that successive frontiers acted as a safety valve, an outlet for those of mindless violence out from society to advance so-called civilization westward.

But as *Moby-Dick* and "The Bear" show, the vanquished side may have witnesses and become the authors of history and myth. And American history by the late 20th century ignites a growing condemnation of the practices taken to establish itself, "The Bear" focusing on such renunciation of heritage. The Judge accuses the Kid 'of breaking with the body he

[131] Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West*, (New York: Vintage International, 1989): 261.
[132] Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West*, (New York: Vintage International, 1989): 82.

was pledged to' and asks him "for even if you should have stood your ground, he said, yet what ground was it?"[133] For near the end of the novel, the Kid engages in some version of redemption by protecting a penitent cult and apologizing to a woman killed early in the novel. By his death, the Kid can only grasp at understanding the justifications for violence he has heard and dies without ever incorporating any such philosophy. It is this lack of redemption, this unawareness that separates the Kid from his literary forebearers Ishmael and Ike. A hunt involves aligning signs left behind by a now absent animal towards its present state. Myths, according to Joseph Campbell, are "an organization of symbolic images and narratives metaphorical of the possibility of human experience and fulfillment in a given culture at a given time."[134] McCarthy resistance to engaging mythic narratives that connect the events of *Blood Meridian* may reveal his purposes. That unlike Melville or Faulkner, who before their time recognized the underlying horror of our national myths, McCarthy may instead attack not the myths, but the structure of myths themselves, denying narrative in order to reveal its power in minimizing or glossing over the true horror of humanity.

So in saying McCarthy does not attempt to give order to the hunt, I argue that without the Kid in a narrative-controlling capacity like Ishmael or Ike, the Judge represents taking advantage of the human desire for an explanation, teasing an answer while refusing to fulfill any explanation. "Your heart's desire is to be told some mystery," the Judge says to the gang at one point, "The mystery is that there is no mystery."[135] Like Moby Dick, the Judge

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[133] Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West*, (New York: Vintage International, 1989): 319-320.
[134] Gary Abrams, "Conversation with Joseph Campbell / On Mythology : Scholar to Attend 'Hero's Journey' Benefit for Hermes Society," *Los Angeles Times, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1987-05-27-vw-1659-story.html.*
[135] Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West*, (New York: Vintage International, 1989)

remains enigmatic still after the novel's end, a supreme force of unexplainable violence. And in such line, the Judge as ritual master sounds the novel's understanding of the meaning for the hunt. Elsewhere, the Judge echoes the idea of the hunt as a testing of wills in his speeches and in his actions destroying artifacts. In Nacogdoches, the Judge invents a story that accuses a preacher of fraud, heresy, and pedophilia among other crimes which causes violence to erupt. Consequently, the Judge demonstrates a proclivity to lie in order to incite bloodshed. Rick Wallach argues that "behind his valorization of science and disavowals of mystery, then, the judge is an obfuscator who drives matters into sul-de-sacs both literal and figurative where he can substitute obliteration by violence for resolution."[136] The Judge betrays the gang when they settle into stasis conducting robberies at the ferry, amassing material wealth without any further acts of great violence. The dance of death must continue for the Judge, and his words stand suspect as means to incite others to commit acts of violence. Like Ahab, the Judge gives speeches and conducts rituals that serve to bind others to serve his own egotistical pursuits. But unlike Ahab, the Judge does not die and continues to keep alive the dance of death. He is an evil that waits upon humanity in America, a guide leading people to their toward doom. The Judge convinces Glanton's Gang to massacre the Yumas, then facilitates the Yumas to kill Glanton's Gang, and hunts down the rest of his prior party to the last man. Round and round, the Judge keeps the music of violence playing, doom over and over again, death and destruction alive.

While Faulkner seeks to align one horrific act in "The Bear" with larger institutional and societal structures, McCarthy does the opposite. Motivated by mindless violence, the Kid

[136] Rick Wallach, "Judge Holden, *Blood Meridian*'s Evil Archon," in *Sacred Violence: Cormac McCarthy's Western Novels*, ed. Wade Hall and Rick Wallach (El Paso: *Texas Western Press*, 2003), 9.

drifts unthinkingly into various structures that give violence meaning, remaining unfederated to any cause. Each economy or ideology the Kid participates in shares violence as its common denominator. His participation in Captain White's crusade involves no more motivation than his killing of the bartender who would not pour him a drink. "What is true of one man," the Judge says, "is true of many." And in agreement the narrator describes the Delawares in Glanton's Gang:

> If much in the world were mystery the limits of that world were not, for it was without measure or bound and there were contained within it creatures more horrible yet and men of other colors and beings which no man has looked upon and yet not alien none of it more than were their own hearts alien in them, whatever wilderness contained there and whatever beasts.[137]

There is a shared inhumanity McCarthy locates across frontiers and borders. Crews identifies Melville's line "Yet now, federated along one keel, what a set of Isolatoes were!" as his first example of McCarthy borrowing the work of other writers. In *Moby-Dick,* Ishmael says such to describe the universal brotherhood, joint-stock enterprise of man by which common humanity unites men of different races and backgrounds.[138] Cormac McCarthy uses this line to describe Glanton's Gang in their pursuit of scalps: "Each man scanned the terrain and the movements of the least of creatures were logged into their collective cognizance until they were federated with invisible wires of vigilance and advanced upon that landscape with a single resonance."[139] McCarthy follows the universality of Melville but with much darker

[137] Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West,* (New York: Vintage International, 1989): 144.
[138] Michael Lynn Crews, *Books Are Made Out of Books* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2017): 8.
[139] Ibid.

tone, seeing ill will common as brotherhood uniting the mixed people hunting parties. No better example follows than the contrast between the light-hearted kneading of spermaceti that occurs in *Moby-Dick* and the crossing of streams and mixing of gunpowder with urine that happens in *Blood Meridian* before the Apache war party is slaughtered on the mountain top.

With such a shifting and unstable hunting narrative, *Blood Meridian* resists a clear or coherent mythology. Steven Shaviro argues: "what is most disturbing about the orgies of violence that punctuate *Blood Meridian* is that they fail to constitute a pattern, to unveil a mystery or to serve any comprehensible purpose."[140] *Blood Meridian* is a shattered mosaic of violence in which no one order persists to explain the ubiquitous killing upon the frontier. The Kid, as the focal point, drifts between different structures ordering the violence from the Manifest Destiny aims of Captain White to the 'butchering sort of business' of scalp hunting to pleas of the ex-priest. "God's blood," Tobin says to the Kid when the latter shies away from killing the Judge, "do you think you'll best him any other way? Do it, lad. Do it for the love of God.[141] McCarthy overturns the ideology of Captain White with the fabled horde and the business of scalp hunting when Glanton's Gang continues their enterprise without monetary gain. McCarthy undermines Christianity throughout the novel in desecrated churches and in the Judge's domination over the ex-priest. When Tobin orders the Kid to shoot the judge, he fails to convince the Kid. For the Judge strikes a fear and awe in the Kid that contradicts a world ruled by an all-powerful and benevolent God, a power beyond the Kid's capacity to slay. Like the white whale, the Judge does not die and instead destroys

[140] Steven Shaviro, "The Very Life of Darkness: A Reading of *Blood Meridian*," in *Perspectives on Cormac McCarthy*, ed. by Edwin T. Arnold and Dianne C. Luce (Oxford: University Press of Mississippi, 1993): 147.
[141] Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West*, (New York: Vintage International, 1989): 298.

those that hunt it. And just as Ike does, the Kid passes up two opportunities to kill the legendary figure. For McCarthy's focus is not upon a whale nor a bear, but a storyteller, a myth-maker as the legendary force within the novel. Rather than the narrator, who through the hunt gives human significance to the avatar of the wilderness, the myth-maker represents a supreme evil and the fountainhead of violence.

Much like Their Own Image

In *Moby-Dick*, the hunt takes place between the worlds of the *Pequod* and of Moby Dick. In "The Bear," the hunt takes place between the hunting camp and the big wood of Old Ben. The scalp hunters of *Blood Meridian* hunt Comanches for the Mexican government, which in turn hunts them. They slaughter Yumas, who then slaughter them. Their own leader, The Judge himself, then hunts them down to a man. With a hunting tale that evades narrative, *Blood Meridian* presents acts of violence without correlation. Rick Wallach quotes Guetti's assertion that "*'The Bear'* seems a neat parallel to *Moby-Dick*…The hunt in general is suggested to be an attempt to give order to something that be finally beyond order."[142] I contend McCarthy's novel expresses the hunt as something beyond order and does not attempt to even try to assert order or establish order. That in *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy reveals how unstable hunting narratives become without a guide to direct and establish meaning and may even suggest those narratives come after the violence to justify and give meaning to what once occurred as a mindless impulse.

[142] Rick Wallach, "Moby Bear: Thematic and Structural Concordances between William Faulkner's 'The Bear' and Herman Melville's 'Moby Dick,' *The Southern Literary Journal*, vol. 30, no. 1 (1997): 52.

Captain White articulates a justification for violence most late 19th-century readers would be familiar with in regard to Manifest Destiny. As the leader of a group of filibusters, veterans of the Mexican War who aim to take land away from Mexico by force and settle it, Captain White justifies his intervention through cultural and racial superiority: "What we are dealing with, he said, is a race of degenerates. A mongrel race, little better than niggers. And maybe no better…. We are dealing with a people manifestly incapable of governing themselves. And do you know what happens with people who cannot govern for themselves? That's right. Others come in to govern for them."[143] Captain White speaks to an historical, cultural, and ideological justification for slaughter and national expansion that Anglo settlers used as a self-serving motive behind Manifest Destiny. Like Indigenous tribes, the Mexican nation forfeits their right upon the land by their juxtaposition to white, American society. Since the Mexican people have not slaughtered "the heathen horde" operating within their territory and failed to maintain as efficient of an economy than that of America, Captain White argues the necessity of armed intervention and usurpation of the land. Not only does the myth of Manifest Destiny, like that of the hunt, justify one's mastery over the land but also necessitates expansion into land controlled by those less superior.

There is something of Ahab in Captain White who argues for the filibustering as a part of a larger mythic narrative, but one suspects that it serves his individual and egotistic desires. He bemoans the settlement of the Mexican War: "We fought for it. Lost friends and brothers down there. And then by God if we didn't give it back."[144] His words recall Ahab's loss of his leg in that a personal deprivation snowballs into greater significance as he tries to

[143] Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West*, (New York: Vintage International, 1989): 36.
[144] Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West*, (New York: Vintage International, 1989): 35.

enlist others in his quest to reclaim the land supposedly owed to him. The Kid agrees with Captain White in so far as to be accepted into the ranks which furnishes him with a horse, saddle, and rifle. In a telling moment of his motivation, the Kid asks Captain White about a saddle after hearing the long sales pitch. The uneducated Kid asks only about his immediate concerns for a saddle, not about the land White promised as the reward of enlisting nor the patriotic ideology. And neither does Captain White's rhetoric later sink in; the Kid shows no qualms working for that "race of degenerates" unfit to govern when he contracts for the Sonoran governor to hunt scalps. And after, the Kid participates in trading with Magnas Colorado and is saved by a group of Diegueños. In an ironic twist, the filibusters are slaughtered by that "heathen horde" of a lower order than the Mexicans. But even as emerging as the sole survivor from that massacre, the Kid does not follow Ishmael in trying to make sense of such event but merely continues on as he had done since leaving home.

I believe McCarthy recognizes the work Melville and Faulkner previously had done and sets out to reach a different conclusion. Rather than remake Ahab in the Judge as myth-maker to serve his egotistical desire to overcome nature, McCarthy creates a character that 'lacks his humanities' and whose purposes revolve around inciting the greatest violence. Unlike Ahab, the Judge exhibits no qualms in needlessly disposing of his manpower as he does when counselling the Yumas to massacre Glanton's Gang. Rather than replay Ike's attempt to restore the holy relationship of man and nature, the Kid's gesturing towards redemption remains unsuccessful and he dies with only a feeble understanding of his circumstances. And rather than engage his narrative as myth-making, McCarthy isolates the Kid from understanding the Judge's myth and therefore, offers much resistance to any grand claims about specific theses about American expansion. The Kid reflects humanity and its

fallings but short of any education or initiation cannot be more responsible for possessing "a taste for mindless violence."

So stripped of narration, *Blood Meridian* engages only the bare bones of the hunter-hero narrative—the kid leaving his family home, setting out upon a process of initiation that never resolves, a quasi-father figure who acts as a ritual master in the Judge, and the tracking and killing of prey. But the world of *Blood Meridian* seems a far cry from that of *The Leatherstocking Tales*, so suffused with doom particular to *Moby-Dick* and "The Bear." McCarthy's revision of the hunter-hero narrative does not return closer to the tropes of the myth, but rather further extends and subverts Melville's and Faulkner's depictions. As if a new tradition had been established through *Moby-Dick* and "The Bear," McCarthy seems to subvert the hunter-hero tradition on the basis of the revisions of Melville and Faulkner. For example, McCarthy's rejection of interiority for the Kid seems less to engage with the archetypal American hunter-hero than with Ishmael and Ike, whose consciousnesses control their respective narratives. Ishmael tells the *Pequod*'s quest in a linear narrative but interrupts the text with research only later gathered. Faulkner extended Ishmael's narrative control to greater complexity with Ike whose interiority bends the linearity and time of "The Bear"'s text to fit his own personal narrative. McCarthy pans back from one specific interiority and further back still from the stereophonic perspective of Melville to a point almost unaware of interiority. The Judge speaks his mind, but unlike the soliloquies of Ahab, the reader cannot distinguish between truth and performance in the Judge. McCarthy may in the character of the Judge locate performance itself as the motivator of the hunt as well as violence more generally.

For as opposed to the depictions of Apache or Yuma in the novel, Glanton's Gang resembles an archetypal image of Indigenous populations. And the discrepancy between this resemblance to cannibals and the actual portrayal of native peoples is important. The description of the scalp hunters distills the larger effort McCarthy makes in *Blood Meridian* whereby he engages with the hunter-hero tradition, often on the same aspects that Melville and Faulkner subverted, and develops his own narrative that recognizes the violence of the hunting myth with the horror of human conflict in American history. For such shows McCarthy's awareness of the dynamic between cultural ideas and historical facts, drawing attention to the Anglo stereotype of the 'savage.' Melville subverted the sacred marriage trope by underlying its imagery with an antagonistic dynamic. Building upon Melville's specific subversion of the hunter-hero, McCarthy describes Glanton's Gang as resembling not the peoples that they hunt, but their racist stereotype of such peoples. As Richard Drinnon argues in *Facing West*, such image recognizes native peoples as "natural objects, extensions of the nature that had be subdued" and thereby motivates as well as justifies murdering them. [145] Just as Ahab projected his own fears and anxieties onto Moby Dick, the Judge creates an image for the native peoples which marks them out for destruction. Drinnon contends: "Herein resided the deeper significance of the frontier. In each and every West, place itself was infinitely less important…than what the white settlers brought in their heads and hearts to a particular place."[146] Whether sea, backwoods, or desert, the hunter-hero myth pervades as a system that promises regeneration for the pursuit and slaying of an imaginary creature, be it an avatar or a savage. That such symbolic bears upon real animal, real peoples

[145] Richard Drinnon, "*Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating & Empire-Building* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980): 462.
[146] Ibid, 463.

is the horrid reality underlying the myth, the horror and violence that McCarthy, Faulkner, and Melville all recognize.

The Judge speaks his catechism:

> "The truth about the world, he said, is that anything is possible. Had you not seen it all from birth and thereby bled it of its strangeness it would appear to you for what it is, a hat trick in a medicine show, a fevered dream, a trance bepopulate with chimeras having neither analogue nor precedent, an itinerant carnival, a migratory tentshow whose ultimate destination after many a pitch in many a mudded field is unspeakable and calamitous beyond reckoning."[147]

Ike saw the hunt from birth and bled into its strangeness, accepted it fully as a narrative for his life. Ishmael too pledged himself to the myth of the hunt, stating that "Ahab's quenchless feud seemed mine."[148] McCarthy redirects his protagonist away from aligning himself, or even understanding, the mythic hunt. *Blood Meridian* without such direction subordinates the justification for the repeated and horrific moments of violence that populate the text to voices that seemingly offer not narratives but performances of narrative. Dubious, inconsistent, and theatrical, the Judge who represents the foremost authority in the novel evades a clear motivation behind the numerous acts of violence in the novel. He, himself the perpetrator of the most horrific transgressions in *Blood Meridian,* remains consistent only in his glorification of war. "If war is not holy man is nothing but antic clay," he tells the Kid just at

[147] Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West*, (New York: Vintage International, 1989): 256.
[148] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; Or, The Whale*, ed. Herschel Parker and Harrison Hayford, (New York: Norton & Company, 2002): 152.

the jailhouse.[149] If anything, *Blood Meridian* portrays war as an unholy enterprise and thereby answers the question it proposes when the Kid first departs from his childhood home: "Whether the stuff of creation may be shaped to man's will or whether his own heart is not another kind of clay."[150] The answer to such question depends on the narrative, one of which McCarthy refuses to provide in the novel.

War is holy, the hunter-hero tradition contends, and the stuff of creation can thereby be shaped to man's will. In achieving regeneration and moral freedom, the mythology justifies the violence that its narrative requires. Melville proposed war as unholy, satanic and denied Ahab from exerting his force over nature. Faulkner framed the hunt as a holy enterprise and saw his protagonist complete his initiation only to be powerless against the opponents of the wilderness and the ideals he elected to defend. McCarthy reframes the hunter-hero structure to emphasize the dynamic between narrative and reality rather than between man and nature. Instead of the frontier providing a struggle between human capability over the wilderness, McCarthy sees a question of ideology, of enlistment into narratives, of whether or not violence constitutes a holy pursuit. For without a structure or order to the hunt, violence stands as an unexplained proclivity of humanity. And historical narratives that justify violence stand suspect, not for leading humanity astray ideologically, but for providing an opportunity to join together on a shared and natural inclination for cruelty.

[149] Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West*, (New York: Vintage International, 1989): 319.
[150] Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West*, (New York: Vintage International, 1989): 5.

Wider Reading

After such a long journey to reach this point, providing the background on the hunter-hero, recognizing *Moby-Dick* in such tradition, connecting Faulkner to Melville, and bringing all that cargo to bear upon *Blood Meridian*. After such an effort for this thesis (and you, dear reader), I feel it necessary to at such height to take a wider look over this literary landscape and venture a broad reading across this literary lineage that this thesis set out to establish.

Cormac McCarthy follows the general structure of both *Moby-Dick* and "The Bear." Like *Moby-Dick*, *Blood Meridian* follows the life of a neophyte hunter focusing on his enlistment in a bloody business, continued participation in the hunt after the economic incentive is forgone and ends in the decimation of the hunting party. And like "The Bear," McCarthy centers the narrative of the protagonist on his engagement with a single creature (the Judge as opposed to Old Ben) and abridges the Kid's life otherwise. The summarized space in between the Kid and his renaming as the Man resembles the jump Faulkner takes late in section four through the years Ike works as a carpenter and marries. The narrative structure of a new hunter leaving home, assimilating into the wilderness, and engaging in a violent hunt corresponds across the three text and links each with the hunter-hero tradition. The focus upon each protagonist's enlistment, a mixed-raced hunting party, upon violent transgression both physical and cultural, and upon a pervasive sense of doom that *Moby-Dick*, "The Bear," and *Blood Meridian* share separates them from the archetypal American hunter-hero.

With such differentiation from the hunter-hero trope, an archetype of great national and cultural significance, these three authors reveal a deeper engagement with the mythology than the idealized, popular depictions of the hunter which emphasize optimism, rugged individualism, and mastery over the wilderness as a productive and creative act. The doom, impotency, and destruction of *Moby-Dick,* "The Bear," and *Blood Meridian* recognize the violent and horrific history glossed over in the popular imagination regarding American history. Moreover, these authors reveal the contradictory assumptions and dynamics that underlie the American hunting mythology. Melville brought out the myth's presupposition of symbolic regeneration in *Moby-Dick,* showing through Ahab the absurd notion that spiritual power and raw material existed equivalently in nature as resources to be harvested. Starbuck recognizes whales for only the economic value, but Ahab holds a mythic perspective that drive him to believe that slaying the white whale will allow him to overcome his physical and intellectual limitations. As such, Ahab is doomed even before he even locates and lowers to revenge himself against *Moby-Dick.* Melville subverts the hunter-hero myth for its equation of violence for regeneration, a transcendence that is won by overcoming the power of nature. He shows that for all the myth's idealism and reconciliation of hunter and prey that the Anglo derivation of the hunting myth frames the hunt as a battle, a struggle to extract power from nature. As opposed to some Indigenous myths who frame the hunt as a gift from a higher power, the American hunter-hero ultimately frames nature as antithetical, a notion Melville dramatizes in Ahab's quest.

Faulkner emphasizes a different aspect of the hunting mythology than Melville. Rather than framing the hunt as a battle between a hunter and the natural world, a struggle for something to be won, Faulkner frames the hunt as an education. In such way, the hunter-hero

can attain the archetypal regeneration that is made impossible in *Moby-Dick*. Unlike Ahab, Ike approaches the wilderness with respect and humility. Major De Spain's hunting party tries to kill the avatar of the wilderness, Old Ben, but pursues such hunt without any deep determination. In fact, they are content to call the hunt "the yearly pageant rite of the old bear's furious immortality,"[151] unmotivated to spend any more time or resources on killing Old Ben unlike Ahab. "The Bear" recognizes the value of the hunt in its ability to teach and develop the skills and values for the hunter, where slaying Old Ben demonstrates a level of development, a measure of values. Killing an animal does not offer physical or spiritual power for "The Bear" but confirms and measures powers that exist already in the hunter. Thereby, Faulkner engages with the mythology on a generous and workable basis unlike Melville, granting a positive philosophy and an ideal initiate to start out his rewriting of the hunter-hero myth.

William Faulkner's rewriting of the myth comes later after the death of Old Ben, when the hunter-hero completes his initiation. Assimilated into the wilderness, Ike purified himself from the corruptions of established society and represents a force capable of demonstrating a greater moral freedom. As such he stands as a figure capable to renewing and reviving society with greater spiritual health. The successful hunter-hero represents a creative force, a generative power antithetical to the Old World's decay. And Ike seems to follow such path by recognizing the immorality of the plantation society and slavery, relinquishing his inheritance as not to participate in such system. But nothing generative comes after his relinquishment, Ike becomes an exile in society and powerless to oppose the systems of capitalism, racism, and expansionism. Ike builds no following of disciplines, does

[151] William Faulkner, "The Bear" in Go Down, Moses (New York: Vintage International, 1942): 184.

not bear children nor establish a new lineage, and sees his like-minded compatriots die or go insane. The wilderness which provided him a space to disengage from society and practice an alternative lifestyle disappears. The mechanism of the hunt through which he was educated no longer remains an opportunity in Yoknapatawpha County anymore for those like himself. And stigmatized, devalued, and silenced by a society with a structure of significance that stands antithetical to and entrenched against his ideals, Ike disappears just as Old Ben and the wilderness did.

So, not only does the hunter-hero pose failure and doom for those that misread, mistake, or stray from its ideal assumptions as Ahab provides proof of. But also, Faulkner shows even in an ideal scenario whereby both ritual master and initiate demonstrate a throughout understanding of and alignment with the value system the mythic hunt requires, the hunter dooms himself. Powerless, Ike cannot change the society he becomes capable to recognize for its corruptions nor can he sustain the system as well as the space he elected to defend. Because the process of his conversion came at the cost of what he converted to, his initiation itself constitutes a cannibalistic process.

Violence, likely the most recognizable aspect distinguishing *Blood Meridian*, engages the human desire for explanation. The hunter-hero myths sought to deal with the uncertain fate of the New World and America, but also with unimaginable violence that attended the frontier, the ever-present struggle for survival as well as growth for much of American history. Melville and Faulkner recognized the violence that popular hunter-hero narratives tried to soften or cover upon, seeing the violence inherent in all manner of systems operating within or in the expansion of America. Beyond violence, both authors recognize myriad transgression on the frontier which crossing itself is one kind of transgression, begets only

more. In *Moby-Dick*, Melville recognizes physical violence in the hunt motivated by economic and nationalistic ideas. But violence between peoples is less often depicted. “The Bear” juxtaposes the violence of the hunt and of industry with larger societal violence, especially slavery with acts of sexual and systematic violence. But *Blood Meridian* develops the violence of the earlier works to a horrifying extreme and describes them head-on with unflinching detail and repetition.

In relation to *Moby-Dick* and “The Bear,” McCarthy’s novel shares a focus upon violence and expands upon the earlier works to depict physical transgression on a greater scale and with greater horrific detail. The crucial divergence of *Blood Meridian* involves a resistance toward narration in favor of description which lacks clear causality. Narrative, especially in the form of the hunter-hero, lessened the power of violence but deemphasizing the physical act in favor of the significance or reward such killing act entailed. Cormac McCarthy avoids linking together the violent episodes of his novel and resists offering clear significance to the Kid’s participation in such. Thereby, McCarthy seems to attack myths themselves, narration of any kind connecting violence with meaning, the structures that order murder into significance. Captain White who connects his filibuster raid with the reward of land, justifying himself along the narrative of Manifest Destiny and racial superiority. The Kid who tries to narrate and explain his participation in Glanton’s Gang finds that the woman he speaks to has been dead for a long time, symbolically linked to the woman shot in the park when the Kid first enlists. The Judge stands as the most evil as well as most powerful figure in the novel. He commits the most heinous as well as the most unexplainable acts of cruelty in the novel.

Like Moby Dick or Old Ben, the Judge exerts a gravitation pull on the narration of *Blood Meridian*. McCarthy summarizes the Kid's life before meeting the Judge as well as in between the two's last meeting. The novel focuses upon the Kid's life in relation to the presence of the Judge and the latter receives the power and destructive capability that the white whale and the legendary bear both share. Likewise, the other characters direct focus to the Judge as Tobin does in begging the Kid to kill him just as Ahab and Boon do about their respective legendary animals. If the Judge stands as the target of the hunt for the Kid, a fact not recognized until the second ferry massacre, then McCarthy aligns significance in opposition to the false narrator, the performer and leader of dances, the one whose music aligns people into a single rhythm, a corresponding dance.

The Kid dreams about the Judge as a judge of the currency a cold forger makes and labors in pursuit to making "a face that will pass;" such the Judge judges of even though the "coinage" is for a "dawn that would not be….and the night does not end."[152] The desire of the cold forger is alike the desire of humanity for an answer, a significance to the events one participates in. But the Judge will not accept such currency since dawn will not come to legitimize the currency, the reward of such labor to fashion an image of value, exchangeable for real significance. The Judge entertains such labor and keeps the cold forger trying nevertheless, encouraging the prospect of fashioning an image into value, narrative without ever rewarding it. To the members of Glanton's Gang, the Judge articulates violence as means to suzerainty and the forcing of existence, consequences that lack the prospect of attainment but motivate further violence. Mindless violence motivates the Kid, and the Judge

[152] Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West*, (New York: Vintage International, 1989): 323.

stands to motivate men like Glanton to provide structures that enlist those similarly motivated. On the final meeting, the Judge presses the Kid to narrate his own life: "The emptiness and the despair. It is that which we take arms against, is it not? Is not blood the tempering agent in the mortar which bonds?....Can he say, such a man, that no malign thing set against him? That there is not power and no force and no cause?....No liens, no creditors."[153] Here, the Judge prompts the Kid to answer questions that recognize a narrative, a connection between one's situation and a larger reason entailing it. In asking such seemingly rhetorical questions, the Judge prompts the Kid to recognize a narrative to his life, a causality post-facto unrecognized in his participation in the earlier events. The opposition of the Kid recognizes the central dynamic of *Blood Meridian*— that a narrative does not require the participation of its actors just as, in the Judge's words, "the dance is the thing in which we are concerned and contains complete within its own arrangement and history and finale there is no necessity that the dancers contain these things within themselves as well."[154] Narrative itself, McCarthy is concerned with in *Blood Meridian* and not specific orders, mythic or historical, that link together events. Perhaps an anti-novel, one that rejects the supposition of connectivity, McCarthy creates with *Blood Meridian*, thereby setting it apart from the novels influencing it as well as motivating it. In recognizing the elements of the hunter-hero narrative, McCarthy's novel engages the myth while also undermining its very foundations.

The doomed fate of the Kid stems then from the sublimation of his life within a larger narrative that recognizes his mindless violence as participation in a larger narrative whether

[153] Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West*, (New York: Vintage International, 1989): 342.
[154] Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West*, (New York: Vintage International, 1989): 342.

that is one of capitalism, imperialism, racial superiority, or patriotism. The Kid himself offers no clear and consistent motivation for his participation but nevertheless will disappear, and be consumed by narratives that seek to fulfill the human desire for explanation, the Judge's ordering and alignment of events. Doom, rather than inherent in the hunter-hero myth, exists in the existence of mindless violence for McCarthy, a universal component of humanity that provides enlistments for murderous ventures but also promotes a cruelty unexplainable by the motivating narrative. The Kid shows little understanding of Captain White's filibuster campaign, yet beforehand demonstrates a capacity for violence that resists narrative explanation. Even after committing and participating in numerous murderous acts, the Kid does not provide an explanation for such violence even when the Judge pushes him to do so. Illiterate and unthinking, the Kid resists larger historical or political narratives that McCarthy is inclined to reject and illustrates a feature of the human condition recognized in the novel's third epigraph which finds, 300,000 years back into human history, evidence of scalp hunting, a corresponding act of horrific violence which recurring, seemingly defies context. D.H. Lawrence asks in his essay on *Moby-Dick*: "If the Great White Whale sank the ship of the Great White Soul in 1851, what's been happening since? Post-mortem effects, personability," Lawrence answering his own question. [155] The corresponding doom that attends *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy recognizes from a context aware of the innumerable massacres, the continued occurrence of genocide. Doom that is followed by gathers of bones who "appear restrained by a prudence or reflectiveness which has no inner reality…and which seem less the pursuit of some continuance than the verification of a principle, a

[155] D.H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977): 170.

validation of sequence and causality."[156] But such restraint only appears or seems to exist, for what prudence or reflectiveness would allow such repeated horrors? How easily would some narrative better explain and replace humanity's possession of mindless violence, a cruelty that defies explanation.

[156] Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West*, (New York: Vintage International, 1989): 351.

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